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# HE THAT COMETH

*A Sequel to 'Teil John,' being further  
essays on the Message of Jesus  
and Present Day Religion*

*By*

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## PREFACE

IN a moment which we know not God reveals His Grace. . . . Where the way is prepared there will then come in an hour which we know not, and in a way which we cannot foretell, the baptism with the Holy Spirit of God.'

Thus I wrote in *Tell John*, and the words were prophetic. They had the inevitable obscurity which belongs to the prophet, called to look and to point others forward toward a reality not yet clearly seen. As some of the critics discerned, *Tell John* was written in the spirit of the Baptist, and written to call others to the Baptist's mood of penitent expectancy. Now it is possible for me to reaffirm its message by bearing witness that my hope is fulfilled. Where the way has been prepared, the living Christ does come, bringing forgiveness and liberation and the gift of His Spirit of joy and love. 'John did no miracle ; but all things that John spake of This Man were true.'

## *PREFACE*

The coming of the Christ has meant, as always, that the writer was called out of a lonely individualism, into a deep fellowship of common need and common obedience with other disciples of the Christ. Much that follows has been learnt in fellowship with other disciples in the Oxford Group Movement. My gratitude is due, where they would have it due, to the Christ who is using them to proclaim in these days His life-changing love ; as a mark of gratitude, the usual author's royalties for this book will be given to their work of Christian evangelism.

GEOFFREY ALLEN.

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I

THE GUEST

*John said, 'He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear ; he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.'*

*'Behold I stand at the door, and knock : if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him.'*

*'Be not forgetful to entertain strangers ; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.'*





## CHAPTER I

### *THE GUEST*

WHEN first he came to the threshold of my soul I know not. This at least I know, that as I went to open the door it dawned on my dull mind that his knocking had been going on for some time, and that I had half heard it without heeding it. For all I know, he may have called often before and failed to make me hear.

The first time he came, I asked him to come into my front room, and there sought to entertain him. My words came haltingly, for somehow I felt myself strangely diffident in his presence. Perhaps through nervousness, I spoke much and let him speak little. Nevertheless the courtesy of his silence impressed me with the strange charm of his character ; and I resolved to ask him to stay longer, if ever he should call again.

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Life after all was lonely, and any guest was welcome. The house wherein I dwelt was large and gaunt and bleak, and I lived there alone. I had inherited a spacious mansion, but it had proved far too large for me to manage its maintenance. Gradually whole wings of it had fallen into disuse, so that there were rooms which I had long since ceased to enter, and rooms of whose very existence I had well-nigh forgotten. Some of the rooms seemed haunted, with their broken panes and rattling shutters, and I visited them from time to time, drawn by a fear which attracted while it repelled. Near the front where I dwelt there were rooms, gaunt and bare, into which I seldom went. The windows were closed and the doors locked ; and on the rare occasions when I entered there struck my face the smell of dampness, and of paper rotted and mouldering. It was sad ; but I could not manage all, and I had gradually lost heart, and ceased to try to manage more than a very little. A few rooms at the front I had kept reasonably decent, a kitchen, a bedroom or two, a dining room and a study, and the

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front room for honoured strangers, where first I entertained this guest.

The guest returned, and once more I invited him into the front room, and sought to entertain him. Often he came, and often we talked together, and more and more I felt his charm. He seemed interested in all things which interested me. Nevertheless there was always a sense of formality, of unreality, in our conversation ; and this I could not explain, for I could not feel that there was any desire to be formal on his part. As we came to meet more often, our conversation passed from the weather and the news, to my work, and my play, from these to my friends, and even after a time to my thoughts about religion ; yet still I felt that there was no real intimacy between us.

For long his visits were on such terms as these, and I came to look forward to them with increasing pleasure. There came a day when he found the front door open, and knowing me now well, passed in to look for me in the room where we always met. I was absent at the time, and just at the

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moment when I returned, I found him knocking at one of the other rooms, to see if I were there. I hastily called him back, for he was at the door of a room which had long been in disuse, and which I would not on any account have had him see. Why I should have feared to let him enter, I knew not, and did not pause to enquire. Certainly he did not seem one who would have taken offence at anything, least of all at the sight of one room less clean. Nevertheless, this very perfection in his character made me fear to let anything appear before him, which was not as perfect as I could make it. I feared that he would not care to return, if once he saw how desolate was the larger part of my home ; and I valued his friendship now too much to run the risk of losing it. We returned to our usual room ; but that day more than ever our conversation had all the unreality of the formal pictures and the hard mahogany furniture of the room wherein it took place.

Having once seen him at the door of an inner unclean room, I became somewhat nervous of his visits. I could not say that

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he might not come in through my open door, but I dare not let him enter and look for me in the rooms that lay behind. The more I came to know of the purity of his person, the more did my fear of his ever beholding the uncleanness of my house increase. I went round and examined the doors of the inner rooms, and saw that their locks were in good order, and was careful to keep them barred. Often, in my fear lest he should enter other rooms, I kept my front door closed, and would not let him enter there, unless I had first myself unlocked it. Thus for a time I tried to preserve his affection without risking his blame. He lived now in my neighbourhood ; I liked to feel that he was a welcome guest, and that my front rooms were always open to him ; but I took good care that he entered only those rooms, which I myself judged fitting for his eyes.

After a time the thought came to me, that I might ask him to dwell with me for a few nights, and I sought to prepare rooms where he might come. I could not hope to make my whole house fair ; at least I might

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lock the doors which led to certain passages and wings, and make all fair that lay in front. I counted my resources to see if I could afford to have the front rooms decorated. I laboured long hours myself when I found that my resources would fail. While I was thus labouring I became yet more nervous of his presence. I must needs open the rooms which I would endeavour to clean ; I must needs myself become soiled and tired through my work ; I would not have him enter and thus see the work on which I was engaged. Carefully while I worked I kept the front door locked ; and sometimes if I heard him knock I hid silent, and let him go away believing that I had not heard. I told myself that I was tired with my labours, and that for his sake I would not talk with him, unless I was able to present my best self to him ; at heart I knew that this was false, and that the real reason why I would not let him enter was that I was ashamed. Anxiety, the deeper fear of blame which produced anxiety, the deeper pride which dared not face his searching judgment, though I would scarcely admit it even to myself, it

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was these which caused my secret lie, so that I let him knock and knock and depart.

Despite my utmost anxious efforts my work was unavailing. My powers were not sufficient for the task. The rooms had decayed too far for me to make them new and fair. Such little cleanliness as I could bring into them was soon spoiled ; the dust and dirt settled again more heavily, wherever I sought to remove it. I abandoned the vain task, and reconciled myself once more to our formal meetings in the front room. But now the memory of my vain endeavour, and the anxious knowledge of all that lay behind, made me continually nervous and self-conscious in his presence, and made our communion with one another yet more unreal. Looking back, there may now seem to have been little enough reason for my anxious fears ; but for fear there is always little enough reason, once it has been removed !

For a time longer these were our relations, and then he brought me nearer to the moment of crisis. I had hoped to have him for ever as an acquaintance, since I dared

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not trust him and have him as my friend. I thought that I had become accustomed and reconciled to the formality of our meetings, and that things might ever so remain. Yet perhaps, too, at heart I knew this could not be. I was forced to face the issue, when one day he spake, and said that he had come to love me dearly, and asked if he might come to dwell with me. He said that he trusted that he had my love, and that I would not resent his request. What answer to make I knew not. If I said yes, then I must open my doors to him ; and though I knew his love, I dared not risk the proving of his love. I feared to face the look of blame which might come across his face. I feared that he would enter and see and turn away. Yet the only alternative was to refuse his proffered friendship. If I would not accept his offer of a fuller intimacy, then it seemed that I could scarcely still entertain him on formal terms. If I would not accept his friendship, then I must find some excuse for breaking off our long acquaintanceship. I sought to evade the issue by saying that I was busy at the time, and that it was not

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immediately convenient to answer. I knew that my business deserved the less kind name of an anxious evasiveness, and that very soon I must needs face the issue and make reply.

Curiously, it was over a very small point that the decision came. A little later, while I was wondering and fearing and asking whether I dare let him see the hidden rooms, he pointed to a casket on my table and asked what it contained. The box contained the rusted keys of rooms long locked. For a moment all my hidden fears were focussed on this one small object. Then its very smallness gave me courage, and greatly daring, I opened it for him to see. Looking back, I know that he had guessed the secret of my fears long before I told him ; and that in generous sympathy he had focussed his request that he might be allowed to aid me on to something trivial, that with the trivial I might first learn from my side to say yes to his requests. Let others be warned that he may thus come in the trivial ; then they too will recognise his coming, and for the joy that is set before them, despise shame.

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He saw the keys, and at once won my confidence by speaking of the dank discomfort of bolted rooms, and of the healing power of fresh currents of air, and the sunlight of God. Again greatly daring, I took the keys and placed them in his hands. Together we went and turned the keys in some of the nearer rooms. Without shadow of blame, he said only, 'How terrible for you to dwell alone amid this desolation.' As he said it, I realised for the first time how great the lonely desolation had been.

When he had seen a few of the rooms, he said at once, 'And now, when may I come to stay with you?' My fears were released. From that moment I bade him welcome, and from that moment he stayed. His next words came, 'You will let me aid you to open up and to clean these nearer rooms, that we may rid the house of the gloom which for so long you have borne.' He whom I had thought too pure, if he saw, to stay, then girded himself with a towel, and knelt in the dust to aid me clean the dust. Never had I known the full measure of my shame till that moment, when I knew that my

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fears were groundless, and that for all the time I had had no cause for shame.

Gradually, room by room, yet how quickly, at his suggestion, and with his aid, we worked. His resources of power seemed boundless ; in his presence I, too, refound my long lost courage, and found that my arms were also strong. Sometimes we would work together, cleaning and redecorating a room which we had previously opened, and made fresh from its stale, damp air. Sometimes he would wander round the house, and would then return to suggest that we should work at a room of whose very existence I had long ago forgotten. He had a genius for creating beauty with little material aid. To see rooms long dank and foul become fresh and beautiful under his hands was to live in a realm of daily miracle.

It was not alone at the long-closed rooms behind that he laboured. The formal front parlour, which once I had thought so fair in its rigidity, now showed its grim discomfort, by contrast with the new gaiety of other rooms. At his suggestion, we took down the frowning prints which had greeted

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the passing stranger, frightening him into formality and frowns. The rooms which first a stranger should enter became rooms where quickly he might feel himself at home.

Very shortly, while still the work was in process, there came a second crisis. Much of the house had been thrown open to the cleaning, healing air ; many rooms had been redecorated, and offered a joyful greeting in their beauty to all who should enter ; and together as we had worked we found new joy and new courage, and an intimacy which before I had never known. Much still remained to be done, for the rot of long years cannot be wholly removed in a day ! At this point, when many rooms were fair which I had ceased to hope could ever again become fair, he made a new request. He told me that he would gladly abide for ever with me, and that he would always be willing to aid me in the management and upkeep of my house. He then gently reminded me that he had many other friends. I had imagined that all who knew him were as perfect in purity of love as he. He now told

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me that all of his friends needed his aid, and that very many of them were unwilling to accept it, as for long I myself had been. He asked if at his cost they might be invited to stay and meet him in my house. He suggested that if they were told of its former state and shown its present beauty, if perhaps, too, they were allowed sometimes to see us actually at work together, then their false shame might be overcome, and they, too, might be willing to accept his aid.

With this new request, for a moment all my past fears returned. Could I let other men know of the desolation in which I had lived? Up to this time, even my few most intimate friends, (and they were few!), I had allowed only to see those few front rooms which I thought fitted for their eyes. Must I now let them know that I had all along deceived them, in concealing from them the true state of all that lay behind? Must I let them know that I had kept them at a distance from my real life, on front parlour terms? Must I let them know that I had kept not only them, but this my all-loving guest on front parlour terms? The memory

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of my false shame now made me again ashamed. And what of the work that still remained to be done? How could I win them for my guest, by letting them enter a home where much still remained unclean? On the other hand, how could I conceal from them that a change had come, when they would see a new beauty, a new cleanliness, at their first entrance into my house? These and other thoughts flickered through my mind, battling for the mastery of my will. Fear bid me lock at all costs to other men, those doors which fear for so long had kept locked against him. Behind the fear lay once more pride, lest I should be forced to acknowledge to others, what as yet I had never fully acknowledged to myself, my own complete defeat without his aid.

Then there came, suggested by a look or a gesture from the guest, while he knelt in the dust at work, thoughts of another order. I remembered another picture, more stern and more severely true, for those who entertain each other amid the formality of the front parlour, while all is dark within. I remembered, and for the first time understood, the

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picture of men walking about as coffins on legs, dead within, and vainly concealing their deadness behind the outward varnish. I remembered, and now myself knew the healing love of Him who first used that picture. I asked myself, could I really suppose that the judgments of my fellow men would prove more severe than the judgments of His holy love? I asked myself, need I really fear their judgments, now that I had faced His and found myself forgiven? I asked, should the pride rule my will which would not acknowledge my earlier failure, or should the gratitude rule my will which should now bear witness to His success? While He knelt at work to make clean new rooms, should I really rise to lock my doors in the face of others who might come to meet Him? Should I really bear witness to all that He had done, by now pretending that I had never needed, or did not still myself need His aid? Should I not best make known His power by allowing all who cared to see Him at work? I asked at last, if I would not allow His friends to come through open doors to meet Him in my house, must

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I not then allow that He would depart from me to meet them elsewhere, leaving me to my former desolation? With this last thought I handed Him the keys, and invited Him to stay henceforth as Master of the mansion of my soul ; and to use all that was in it, the beauty which He had created and the ugliness which He must needs remove, as, and when, and how He would, to make known to others, the measure of the love which He had shown to me.



## II

### A HOST

*‘ Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old ? . . . Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.’*

*‘ Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist : notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.’*

*‘ John did no miracle : but all things that John spake of this man were true.’*



## CHAPTER II

### *A HOST*

THE story of the guest which precedes this essay is written in the first person. It is written in the form of an allegory, that each reader may feel that he himself is the 'I' who speaks in the story, for just so far as he can. As the story develops, it is evident that there is a change in the character of the 'I' who speaks in it. The 'I' who speaks in the early part of the story is not lord of his own house, despite the fact that he lives in it alone; there are rooms which he dare scarcely visit himself, and many rooms which he dare never show to others. Because of these fears, the 'I' is now timid, now arrogant, now hiding within from those who would see, now boldly self-assertive in shutting the doors against those who would enter. The 'I' who speaks at the end of the story can pass freely through the whole house, and can

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freely let others see the whole house ; though he no longer lives there alone, he is master of the house as never before he was ; he has become servant and is therefore free, is under authority and can therefore speak with authority. Though a few details of the allegory may have been determined by the form in which it is written, in broad outline and for the most part in minute detail the 'I' which there speaks is the 'I' of the writer. It is fitting that at this stage the curtain of allegory should be lifted, and that I, the writer, should appear, as the person whom God has created and converted and led forward to the moment where I now write this book. By thus speaking in this second essay from my concrete personal experience, I may lead readers to apply what they read to the concrete situation of their own personal lives. In later chapters, in order that the book may have a wider reference, its message can then again be put in general and often in allegorical form.

Like many others in these days, for a time my mind outran my practice. Sincerity of mind I learnt to treasure at an early age ;

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sincerity of speech and action was for long years inhibited by fear. I was brought up in home and school and college to have a theoretic knowledge of the Christian faith. As my mind grew, I determined, as many others have done, not to repeat or pledge assent to Christian doctrines which I had been taught at second hand, but which had no living meaning for myself. One by one I rejected as unreal, at any rate to me, all the doctrines which I had been taught. When I was ordained with certain friends, I insisted before my Bishop that I could not and would not repeat in the church, doctrines which meant nothing to me, but that I would only preach realities which God had given me in the form of living personal conviction. My Bishop very wisely respected my sincerity, and in patience allowed that those who sought with open mind to seek for truth, would by the Living Spirit be led to find the truth. Gradually then, one by one, I found that the doctrines to which I could not yet assent, had another and deeper meaning than that which I had myself as yet seen. It was as though I had gone

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to visit a church, noted for the beauty of its windows ; I saw first just the outside of the windows, with curious tracery begrimed with dirt, and seeing only this, rightly refused to call it beautiful ; later, I was led of God to enter the building, and, standing myself in darkness, beheld now the radiant colours, bright with the golden light beyond.

For several years I grew step by step into an increasing understanding of the implications of the Christian faith. I went to school, with writers of the New Testament and leaders of the present revival of Reformation theology on the continent as my principal teachers. During these years as a minister and a teacher I practised religion after the methods of human Christian practice, and endeavoured to teach others to understand and live the Christian life. At times God granted me the encouragement of vision. The lesson that God guided those who waited in early morning quiet for His guidance was reinforced, when I had failed thus to wait, by a vision of a Bible open at a certain psalm ; when later, somewhat

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doubting, I turned up the Psalm whose number I had seen, I found, rebuking and encouraging, the verse, 'Early in the morning will I make my prayer unto thee.' Nevertheless, behind a growing understanding of Christian theology, and a measure of Christian practice and even occasional mystic vision, I had a heart sick and ever growing more sick. A deep-rooted moral conflict returned to the assault, and overcame my will with ever greater vigour, the more I battled against it. Buried hatreds festered in my heart, where by every Christian law there should have been love. The knowledge of my inner sickness inhibited the reality of prayer. I dare not ask through long hours to know God, when I dare not face the realities of my own nature, and dare not therefore learn what was the mind of God, with regard to myself. Efforts to pray, efforts to rise early for morning quiet, efforts to climb the ladder to heaven on the rungs of mystical manuals of meditation, were unavailing. Here, as over whole tracts of life, I knew to my cost what the early Church called the vanity of works, and what

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modern psychology calls, not less aptly, the law of reversed effort.

As the Spirit of truth led me forward to read and read again the records of the early Church, the conviction became ever more clear that Christendom had fallen back into Judaism, and that nine-tenths of Christian thought and practice were merely Pharisaism in new dress. A day came when this conviction was turned into certainty by a crucial instance ; I was forced to recognise that I myself, after several years of Christian ministry was, still, a Pharisee of the Pharisees. The religion I have so far described is of the exact nature of Pharisaism : and Christ and the early Church discerned its worth, much to the discomfort of the Pharisees. Let us do the Pharisee justice. He has an abundant zeal for good works, for the righteousness which comes as the fruit of human thought and human labours. He is learned in the traditions of religion, and faithful in attendance at worship. Nevertheless, his religion, and it matters not if it be to outward appearance the most lofty Christian religion, is no more than a veneer,



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covering a sick heart, that neither God nor man nor self may face that inward sickness. 'Whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of all uncleanness'; that is the strictly accurate description of my religion at this time. All too probably the other saying was also true of my Christian Pharisaism, that the blind cannot lead the blind. So long as an inward moral conflict is unsolved in ourselves, we are powerless to help others to solve that conflict. We may speak to them of the power of Christ to save; but our pious speaking will merely damage their lives, as the pious speaking of others is damaging ours. We shall merely increase the costly warfare, by heaping up the armaments of pious thought and practice on the one side of life, while the devil is left free to heap up dishonesty and impurity and hatred on life's other hidden side.

In later pages of this book I shall have occasion frequently to speak of the nature and the danger of Christian Pharisaism. Since written words are deceptive messengers of their emotional content, let me at this

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point intersperse a note as to the tone in which the phrase is used. I speak of Christian Pharisaism more in sorrow than in anger, when I think of those whose religion may be of this type ; for I know from my own past experience the full cost of the tension between an outward religious profession and practice, and an inward recurring unconquered sin. I use the phrase in a somewhat angry sorrow, as my mind turns from Christian Pharisees to the people whom they claim to lead into Christian faith. Anger is inevitable, when I think that through failure to face the humiliation of acknowledging their own sin, they lead others, as I was led, the more deeply into this costly tension, instead of leading them to the Saviour who frees from such tension. When I use the phrase I accuse no one ; I state the facts as I have learnt them in my own experience. The Spirit of God shall condemn in their hearts, and, if they will allow it, heal in their hearts, those who know that what I say is also relevant to them.

The costly warfare of inward sin, and an outward veneer of pious thought and practice

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which was powerless against sin, moved me to an ever deeper discontent. The God who was thus proving powerless was a false God ; the God-industry which kept him in being must be exposed for what it was, that a way might be prepared in the world for the lost Spirit of Christ. Life must be stripped of its pious shams. Somehow we must find the power to face life naked, even if for the moment it meant that we should necessarily face life ashamed. In this mood, with the aid of a friend who had travelled so far on the same road, I wrote and published our book *Tell John*. As some of the critics rightly discerned, the book was written in the spirit of the Baptist. It was the Baptist's task to prepare the world for the coming of Christ, by making them deeply dissatisfied if he could with their own formal conventional religion. 'Generation of vipers, fleeing from wrath,' he called the devout religious leaders of his day, performing his task in no unstinted terms. The book we feared might provoke stern opposition from scribes who were learned in Christian thought and tradition and proud of their learning,

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from those who were devout in the practice of Christian institutions and proud of their piety, and from all who in these or in other ways were hiding behind the bush in the garden ashamed, while God was calling them forth to stand naked before Him. At one time the fear of human censure made me lose faith in the message of the book, so that I wrote to my friend saying that I could no longer agree to publish it, and that he must just damn it if need be my lack of faith. I went immediately afterwards to a village service, wherein every sentence seemed to resound with the message of the book, so that I returned straight home and added a postscript, that he need not damn my lack of faith, since God had done so. The sentence through which most of all God spake in that service has since been proved true, that when Christ ascends on high, He did and does still open the Kingdom to believers. Some of the kinder critics discerned that there was in the book *Tell John* a deep note of hope. They were right ; despair with things human had led us once more, as it has led others in these days, to believe all things from God.

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Unexpectedly, the publication of *Tell John* served as a bridge over which I was led to cross into closer fellowship with leaders of the Oxford Group Movement. Of course the leaders of that movement, not less than the followers, are human beings with human imperfections, and God has yet greater perfection in store for them. Those who are led into the fellowship of the Groups will not find their leaders less willing than the outside world to accept criticism, provided that criticism is a constructive criticism given in love, and not merely the defensive criticism of those who face yet dare not yield themselves to a quality of life, which they feel at heart puts them to shame. For myself, face to face with the leaders of this Christian fellowship, I was bound in honesty of thought to say that they were living the life which I as yet was only expecting ; they actually lived, what I only theoretically thought to be the true primitive Christianity. I did not like it ; for as long as I could I resisted it by the usual method of finding every possible fault which I could, in those whom I knew with all their faults to be far more Christ-like than

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myself ; nevertheless, I was bound to admit to myself that my mind agreed with their manner of life, while my practice did not accord with it, and that if this were so, there must be something wrong in me. I sought to evade the issue. Like Felix face to face with Paul, I was content to hear what the Spirit through this modern Christian fellowship had to say about faith in Christ Jesus ; but when they spake to me about morality, self-mastery, and the future judgment, I grew uneasy ! In such a situation, it is not Felix alone who evades the issue by saying to those who convict him, ‘ You may go for the present ; when I can find a moment I will send for you.’ Like Nicodemus before Christ, myself a teacher, I recognised teaching that was authoritative ; I was bound to admit that this teaching was followed by the signs of healed and joyful personalities, whereas mine was not ; I was anxious to know the secret of this greater power ; I was not quite so anxious to take to myself the answer, ‘ Except a man be born again.’ Should I, a minister and a theologian of some years standing, need rebirth ? Should

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the humiliating possibility dawn on me, of being converted, and therefore of having to acknowledge that I had needed conversion? Worse still, the facts were there of the inward sickness; should I face the moment of shame of letting the facts come to light? Thus must the high mountain snow-field, rigid and firm and white, cling to the thought that its God-given destiny is for ever to bear witness to an outward whiteness, until one day it finds to its surprise that God had for it the wholly different destiny of being a mountain torrent, strong, and crystal clear, and free.

The day then came when God freed me for His service, as He has led many others, through a sacramental triviality. A leader of the Group Movement had rightly pointed out to me that the real issue was not whether I or anyone else should decide to join the Groups, but rather whether I myself was completely dedicated to Christ, and willing therefore to let this and everything else be decided for me by Him. Shortly afterwards, Christ in His grace led me into the deeper joy of His service, by proving my loyalty

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with a simple request. Clearly one morning in quiet there came a voice, (whether it be given the name of Word of God or guidance or conscience it matters not), bidding me buy myself a new dressing-gown, as an aid to earlier rising for a longer time of morning quiet. For several days I resisted it, with every argument good or bad that I could find. I said to myself that my theology had taught me that God was very great, and that the God I worshipped could not be concerned with things so trivial. I said that I had learnt and sought to practise an admirable principle of stewardship, and that I did not on principle use my money for self-indulgence. An apparently hard saying of Karl Barth's, in his book on the Holy Spirit, was in danger of being proved true ; ' an ethic which thinks it knows and can dispose of the living command of God the Creator, sets itself on the throne of God, stops up and poisons the springs, and does more damage to the Christian life than all the cinemas and dance halls put together.' Another voice in me, to whose tones of pride I listened a little less clearly, said that I was



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too great a person for me to need instruction from God about my shopping. Even so another figure, Naaman, who in his own estimation was a ruler amongst men, very nearly missed the opportunity of being cleansed by God, by saying to himself that if it was a question of bathing, he had many excellent rivers at home ! A very subtle voice, creeping through the tangled pasture of my mind, whispered that my will to rise early was a purely spiritual matter, and that I was not the sort of person to need crude material aid for spiritual things. Deeper, there came a voice of fear, which said that if I did learn to rise early for long quiet before God, I might hear things about myself which were not good to hear. Deeper still, soft yet clear, a voice said that the triviality of the purchase of a dressing-gown was sacramental of the whole tremendous issue, whether or not I lived under orders, whether I lived for self or whether for God. At last, if only to free my mind from inward conflict, with not too good grace I obeyed, bought the dressing-gown, and, with the attraction of its newness to weight my will,

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rose next morning at dawn. Let those laugh at this narrative who can from their own experience in similar ways complete the saying, 'Well done, thou good servant : because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities.' Their laughter will be welcome, for it will echo on earth the rejoicing in heaven, and will be gentle and kind.

From that moment there followed an immediate release from moral conflicts of long years standing, to whose wasteful warfare I had thought myself for ever doomed. Within the next day or two, the first simple step was then taken with a guided letter, to set on an entirely new basis one personal relationship, which till then had had but for rare moments only the grim artificiality of an acted love. Within a week or two I had been used by the living Christ to aid other people, in a way which brought me straight into the realm of New Testament miracle. Day by day, with incredible gentleness, yet with incredible rapidity, the living Spirit showed me new spheres where life before had been soiled, emptied my memories of

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fear and shame, and filled the temple of my mind, now newly cleansed, with love and joy and peace and power. At times, almost with surprise, I found a new person in myself, performing with natural ease a work of love, which the imprisoned self could not before have performed. For the first time I understood the language in the New Testament which till then, despite my study, had necessarily remained a mystery; I understood why once before when Christ had come in liberating power, men spake of a new birth, of becoming as little children, of a second Adam taking the place of the old Adam, of the babes from whom God has perfected praise. Where Christ has spoken, and where men have been humbled to obey, even the religious, even the aged, even a very Nicodemus amongst men, can be reborn.

God, with the respect of love for human freedom, has once more allowed the world to use its freedom to depart from His presence. God, with the generosity of love for human penitence, is once more welcoming back returning prodigals, when these have learnt from

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costly experience that life in the far country is not worth while. When a prodigal has once faced and acknowledged the fact of sin, and suffered himself to be forgiven, and found himself greeted still as son, there is no question of his joining the fellowship of other prodigals. That question is solved for him, for he finds that their common acceptance of the mercy of the Father brings the returned prodigals into immediate fellowship with one another.

In these days there is an ever-growing number of people who are led by the desolation in the outer world of industry and politics, and by the deeper desolation within, to return and offer themselves as servants before God, and there to seek and to find the Father's mercy. Just for a moment, after God had proved merciful, I hesitated to count myself in one fellowship with these His children. Where I had been a Christian Pharisee, unwilling and unable to face the facts of the sins that lay concealed, others whose praise I valued were to all appearance still Christian Pharisees. They would be offended in me, if I now changed my

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allegiance, and preferred the company of happy, forgiven sinners to my former company of unhappy, self-elected saints. In the same way, when first the Spirit of God took religious people and turned them inside out, and made them have acknowledgment of human failings on their lips that so there might be room for His gift of love and peace in their hearts, 'many of the rulers believed on Him ; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue ; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.' For a time pride bid me conceal from men that I, a teacher, had had to go to school with some of God's babes and learn myself to repent and be converted. For a time fear held me back, lest if I confessed that my professing Christianity had been Pharisaism in new dress, others whose opinion I valued would resent the inevitable implication that their religion was also modern Pharisaism, and, resenting, expel me from their midst. When He was ready, God cleansed me from the love of human praise, and the fear of human blame, and

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taught me to set first in open honesty of mind the praise of God.

Thus for me, as for many others in these days of re-awakening, an old story has been retold. It was necessary under the Cross to learn humiliation. Where Christ made Himself of no reputation, it was not for me to endeavour to keep up an appearance of a righteousness which I did not possess. It was necessary for me to take to myself the Nevertheless of the forgiveness of God in Christ, with which He reclaims the sinners in a fallen world, and bids them receive once more His healing love. It was necessary for me to be humbled, and to acknowledge how deeply I had needed forgiveness, that so my sins might no more be concealed behind the doors which pride had locked, but might now bear open witness to the gracious healing power of God. When this had happened, then for me as for others it was proved true that God does still set His Spirit of heavenly love and joy and peace, in the hearts which He has been allowed to cleanse, that they may receive His Spirit.

The Baptist worked no miracle. The

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Baptist simply as forerunner, with a cry for penitent expectancy, prepared the way. He stripped life bare of the false satisfaction of pious pretence, that so men might accept the good news, that God would come to reign in love and joy. It may be that for others, as for myself, God may use the earlier book, *Tell John*, with its tones of a hope born of despair, to lead toward the threshold of the Kingdom. Then in an hour which God chooses and makes known, His Spirit comes in power, to dwell in hearts prepared. There comes, after the Baptist, the Christ, who baptizes from above with living Spirit. All that John spake of this man, all that John hoped for from the coming of the Christ and more, is true. John indeed was the greatest of those born of women ; but he that is least in the Kingdom of the Christ is greater than he.

One last word remains to be said in this essay, for myself as for others. As men advance towards the Celestial city, the devil who resists them has a second line of defence. When he is outflanked and driven back, he retreats rapidly for a long distance, and then

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takes up a new stand to resist the advance. All too easily then, for joy at the new country which we have been allowed to conquer, we think that we have reached the promised land, when we have only taken a few steps towards it. We check our forward march ; we, too, become entrenched in some new position ; we stay to build cities in the land which we have conquered, when the living God would have us live in tents, which we may carry forward with us into new lands. Then, in a day which we suspect not, the powers of evil find us in easy slumber at our comfortable posts, and drive us back from the land which we had won.

Always we need to beware lest once more we become Christian Pharisees. Always we need to watch and pray, lest some new Christian thought or Christian practice becomes once more the cloak of piety, with which we conceal from ourselves and from others, and if possible from God, the unsundered sin that lies within. Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall ! Always we need to be awake that the Spirit of God, at the moment He chooses,



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may convict us of new and unsuspected sin, and thus show us new places where the battle lines of evil are weak, and where we may go forward, alone or in fellowship with others, to further conquest. Always we must be willing to stand once more where the Baptist stood, facing new sin, facing life for a moment naked and ashamed, that so God may cleanse us as He chooses, and enable us once more to face life naked and unashamed. Always then the promise of the Spirit will rest with us, that from day to day, as we hear and obey His voice, He will lead us forward to ever greater vision, ever greater joy, ever greater love.



■

### III

#### AS BABES

*‘ Jesus said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not : for of such is the kingdom of God.’*

*‘ Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.’*

*‘ Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes : yea, Father ; for so it was well-pleasing in thy sight.’*

■



## CHAPTER III

### *AS BABES*

‘EXCEPT ye become as babes, . . .’ We labour to interpret the words. We discuss this and that characteristic of children. We ask whether it means that the elderly should become more simple, or more humble, or more frank, or more playful. We ask ourselves in our grown-up wisdom, what characteristics of the child we should endeavour to imitate. We do not pause to reflect that all such laboured efforts to understand, how we might refashion our lives into childlikeness, are as far as possible removed from childlikeness. The child does not take itself thus to task, and say to itself that it might be more playful or more humble. The moment that it was persuaded by older folk to do so, it would have lost its quality of childlikeness. The mind of the child is not thus divided against itself into the actual

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and the ideal. The unbroken unity of the childlike mind knows nothing of these laboured efforts to be other than it is. With these laboured efforts to understand and to imitate, we are firmly set in a world of a different order which the child does not know. When we thus reason, we have missed the words which stand ahead, 'Except ye be converted, . . .' There must come first the moment of new birth, the moment where we lay aside our human efforts and our human ways of thought and are born again from above. Till that moment comes, we shall not be able to see or understand the world which the child now sees, and which once as a child we saw.

'Except a man be born again . . .' To us as to Nicodemus the words are repeated with insistent force, to all our questions and to all our doubts about the meaning of the Kingdom ; and if with weapons drawn from a modern theological armoury, we begin, like Nicodemus, to dispute and to argue, modern disciples of the Christ will rightly echo back His words in modern form, 'We speak that we do know ; . . . art

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thou a master of Christian thought and practice, yet knowest not these things? ' To each man who has fallen from the first childlike simplicity of mind (and who in this world has not thus fallen?), there must come in full realism, conversion, not a change in our opinions, but the transformation of our whole personality, the rebirth in us of a new nature, the reversal of our choice to live for self in the moment where we are chosen by God to live for Him. Then, and only then, shall we see the Kingdom of God, as in heaven so on earth, with reborn, childlike eyes.

For long we all avoid this necessity of rebirth. We comfort ourselves perhaps with the futile distinction of once-born and twice-born; and pride ourselves that we, having avoided at least the grosser sins in our youth, now belong to the former class. If we thus reason, we show that we have never been born at all; those who have once been born from above know like St. Paul that they must die daily, and daily rise with Christ. We all at first think it absurd to suppose that our nature, especially

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if it be an outwardly religious nature, could be radically contrary to the divine purpose for us. A slight modification here or there we may admit to be necessary, but nothing so drastic as rebirth. We say that you cannot change human nature ; we mean, at heart, that we do not propose to let God change our nature. We refuse to let Him remould and refashion the nature which our selfishness has spoiled, and make it now an instrument fitted for His purposes of love. We refer with a slightly patronising air to the religion of the sick soul, allowing that there may perhaps be others than ourselves who have fallen from grace, and for whom this religion of rebirth is therefore necessary. We do not so quickly acknowledge that if there is in our heart anything of this proud spirit of patronage, it is we who in God's sight are sick.

At last, when in our pride we have done long years of disservice to the purposes of God, perhaps in a day when we least expect it, the Word of God breaks through our complacency, and we find to our surprise that God is at work, converting us. God



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calls us to surrender into His hands the lives which He gave us and which we have spoiled, that He may unmake and recreate ; He makes His calling concrete, it may be by demanding from us some sacramental act of obedience ; we obey, and to our surprise we find His healing hands at work, freeing us from secret sins, and softening the hardened places of our minds. The chrysalis for a time protects its tender life behind a hardened shell, wherewith to resist an unfriendly world. There comes a day when under the warmth of God's sunlight it is changed, and escapes into the world a new being, fragile, yet beautiful and free. In the summer of God the butterfly new-born stretches and strengthens its unfolding wings and flies away. There comes a season in the world of men when the winter of human revolt passes once more to the summer of God's rule. Men had shrunk from one another in a world which they made unfriendly ; they had buried the hidden flame of love behind the hard front of studied apathy and irritation and scorn. The warmth of the love and the forgiveness

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of God, reflected in the Christian fellowship, provides an atmosphere wherein they may break forth into new life. The hardened shell of human fears and hatreds is cast away to perish ; there is born into the world a new creature, tender and strong with all the love of the Creator who first made, and who has now remade.

The rebirth of the soul is not without those pains which accompany the birth of the body. Occasionally, where a life has fallen deeply into sickness, and where deeply repressed fears and shames fester, poisoning the soul, there may come in the process of rebirth a very costly upheaval of the personality. A sick soul may become to all appearance far more sick, as a first step towards its becoming cured. Christ, the master healer, offering the world fullness of health, gathered round Him those who were most urgently aware of their need of health ; some of these were overwhelmed for the moment by the pains of the rebirth of soul, and at first cried out against Him, or fell to the ground foaming. Wherever the Christian Church has performed its true task, and

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has proclaimed a living theology which was at the same time an effective cure of souls, there the sick in soul have gathered round. Inevitably then, one or two have been made worse with the pains of rebirth, as a momentary incident in the process of their becoming cured. When this happens, the enemies of Christ are given an easy occasion to blaspheme. Those who themselves shrink from acknowledging the sickness of their own loveless lives excuse themselves from the cost of rebirth by circulating the slander that it drives men to madness. With such slander there can be no compromise. Because one child dies in birth, shall all the world decline to bear children? Because one soul, greatly diseased, is made to suffer momentary pain as the Master Physician does His work of leading it to fullness of health, shall all the world refuse to be healed?

Far, far more usually, the pains of rebirth are very slight, so that we become amazed at the tenderness with which God does His work of recreation. A slight resentment; a desire to discover every possible petty fault in those who are used by God to convict us of our

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sickness of soul ; a growing irritation as we are brought nearer to the moment of humiliation ; a rather tense, slightly anxious feeling of expectancy, as we realise that something lies ahead which we do not yet understand ;—these are common symptoms that rebirth lies close at hand. The costly humiliation of obedience, when we thought that it was for us to rule and not to obey ; the costly humiliation of admitting before God to ourselves and to our neighbours that we needed rebirth, and of facing the secret sins our pose of piety had hidden ; the disturbance of accustomed habits, as a nature which we thought for ever settled, is fashioned by God into something new ;—these are the pains which normally we are called to suffer. We suffer ; and in an instant the moment wherein we shrank from human cost is transformed into a moment wherein we rejoice with joy divine.

When we are thus reborn, we find the healing hands of God at work, casting out of our personality all that was foreign to the purity and honesty of love, redecorating our mind with whatsoever things are lovely and beautiful and true. We see, looming ahead,

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for a moment dark and forbidding, the mountain range which God would have us cross ; we take the next few steps which He bids us take, and in a moment we find ourselves striding in the freshness of the high mountain air, our eyes charmed with the beauty of the plain, which already lies behind our feet. We pass, step by step, led by the guiding hand of God, through the unknown country ahead ; mountains which seemed for ever to bar our forward march, quietly, after the fashion of mountains, slide from our way into the sea, till we are well-nigh dazzled with the excitement of the rapidly changing scenery of our lives.

Transformed in heart, with eyes reborn we look out on to the world ; and the world we now see is a world which never before we saw. Yesterday, it may be, we were accustomed to drive our car, forcing its pace through the crowded traffic of the roads ; irritated ourselves in heart, we focussed our resentment on those around us ; half the world drove as fools, and the other half drove as knaves, as all the world combined to bar our path. To-day with the calm of God in

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our hearts, we sit at rest as we drive, watching the panorama of the beauty of the world which God displays in ever-changing form before us, seeking only that our driving shall not disturb others who use the highway of God. Perhaps we were accustomed as we walked through crowded streets to have no eyes for our fellow men, except an occasional glance of anger at those who dared jostle us as we walked. Of a sudden, a new being comes to birth in us who looks on fellow-men with eyes of love. We see with new eyes the care-lined masks behind which others hide the souls, not yet liberated into love ; we seek only how we may be used to the maximum on their behalf, as agents on earth for the healing work of Christ.

The new being, who in God's time comes to birth in us, is childlike in willingness to learn. The child, as it is made by God and before it is spoilt by man, has an infinite curiosity, and a miraculous capacity for receiving and appropriating new lessons of knowledge and behaviour. It is, to use a technical term, suggestible, and is gifted by God with amazing power to reject suggestion

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to evil, and to receive and appropriate every suggestion of good. The man, miseducated in the modern world, has lost these childlike gifts. All too quickly our own small knowledge is made the test of all that we need know. A few quickly formed theories are adopted as life-long prejudices, with which we then condemn as untrue all that does not immediately accord with our own opinions. If the Christ came from Galilee, or, if in His works of love He transgressed one detail of the established Sabbath law, He was no Christ for those who had their settled opinions, wherewith to prejudge how God must behave. When the Spirit of Christ comes in power into the modern world, using new phrases drawn from the common speech of England or America, breaking the settled traditions of the institutional religion of to-day, then the scribes and Pharisees of to-day apply their ready rules ; once more they decline to learn from a Spirit who does not immediately accord with their conventions as to what is seemly in divine behaviour. When the soul is reborn, God restores the first childlike willingness to learn. Swiftly

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yet gently, day by day and step by step, God softens the prejudices of the mind and the hard places of the heart, and teaches babes in spirit to grow into the likeness of His love. Let those reborn watch and pray that they keep this childlike willingness to learn, lest a day come when their hearts are once more hardened, and they cease to be led forward into the new lessons of God.

The child, and those reborn into childlikeness, are willing not only to learn, but also to obey. The natural man is created as creature, and as such intended for dependence, not independence. A certain man had three sons. The first came to his father and asked what he might do. His father bade him work in the garden. He went to the work, his heart rejoicing that he might show his love for his father by working in his service. The second son came and received the same request. Conscious of past disobedience, yet unwilling to acknowledge past disobedience, he did not love his father, and therefore could not serve him in spontaneity of love. Nevertheless, dutiful, if resentful, out of a sense of gratitude to the



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father who gave him his life, he went to the work. The third son said within himself, 'Am I not a son ; is it not for me to claim the freedom of a son ; would not my father have me go my own way ? ' ; and thus reasoning he went on his way. There are those, even amongst Christian thinkers, who would take the independence of the third son to be the mark of Christian freedom. The name of the love of God is used to excuse the freedom of the individual to follow out his own self-chosen desires. In fact, this individualism is the lie against the love of God. Jesus did not say, 'Except ye attain the freedom of full-grown men, ye cannot become citizens of the republic of men on earth.' He told a story of the misuse of freedom by a prodigal, and of the prodigal's later return home to offer himself as a servant. Certainly the second son who obeyed resentfully was living in a realm of law and not of grace. We shall not, however, improve on his behaviour by refusing to obey at all. We shall pass to the realm of grace, when like the first son we can obey out of the spontaneity of love, as a child not yet spoiled

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counts it a pleasure to fulfill the request of a parent whom it loves.

The child, and those reborn into childlikeness, are ready to speak plainly out of an honest mind, criticising in love, unafraid of the answering resentment of those whom they criticise. A hostess once rebuked a small child for some trifling offence, not gently correcting him in love, but scolding him with a face that betrayed a cross heart. The child looked at her with untroubled eyes, and replied, 'You look awful when you talk like that.' Until it is inhibited by fear, the child has but one thought in its mind at a time, and speaks that thought, often enough to the consternation of those who have cause to fear plain speaking. With hearts cleansed by love, though not afraid to use love's sword, and with this same honesty of purpose, children of the second birth are free to speak their mind, and to use their freedom to build up the Christian fellowship in love.

Though the coming of the Spirit in the rebirth of the soul means an ultimate conquest of fear, for a time the fears to which children are heir may reappear in strange revival. It

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is not uncommon for older people, who have experienced the liberating love of Christ at work, then to find in themselves for a time a new childlike shyness. A new personality is being born in them, or better, a personality as yet hidden is being set free, and they are not quite confident how this new person will behave in the presence of strangers. Christ has come in power and broken the fetters of long-rooted habits of sin and freed them for new life ; He has set His joy in their hearts, and they would tell of His presence ; yet when they seek to do so, whether in the presence of others of His children, or in the presence of a world yet unredeemed, they are anxious and self-conscious and unable to speak. There is nothing strange in the fact that those who are thus reborn find that the first evil they have to face is a self-consciousness, to which before they were strange. It is not they who are at fault, if they find at first a little difficult their new relationship, to those who are not yet liberated into love. If a babe of four were taken from care-free play and placed in the middle of a court levee, it could scarcely be blamed for

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feeling shy ! Even amongst their equals children are shy and restrained if they are not left to play as their fancy takes them, but if they are marshalled into the unreality of a formal children's party. The child can face life naked and unafraid ; the soul reborn is likewise innocent and free ; the man, guilty of pride and jealousy and greed and ashamed of his guilt, covers his nakedness with every type of artificiality, to conceal from himself the fallen nature of which at heart he is ashamed ; amidst this artificiality of the aged, the childlike are inevitably shy. The remedy for such childlike fears in the presence of other people is simple. If a child is shy, it escapes from its nervousness by becoming yet more childlike, and returning to hold its parent's hand. Even so, those who are reborn into new life, and for a moment nervous of how they shall appear before men, will turn back in all simplicity and grasp the hand of their Father, and seek His guidance. They will find that He gives them some word to say, or some simple task to do, and in immediate obedience they will recover self-confidence. Thus they will find that

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here, and in every sphere, the perfect love of the Father casts out fear.

One other fear will often come in early days to those whom God sets free for new life ; and it is a fear with which the master of fear returns to the battle and leads many astray. The very strangeness of the new life, its liberty, the rich quality of livingness which pales all former living, may well make us for a moment doubt its reality, and become afraid. We may wonder whether our strength of mind or body will stand the intensity of a life, so full of joy and passionate calm and unresting activity for God. We may feel the radical dualism of the new freedom and love and power of the Spirit, and of the old living death of faithless fear, which we see in others and knew and sometimes again know in ourselves ; and we may for a moment fear that this new life, because of its very richness, is unhealthy or unreal. There is a radical qualitative difference of consciousness between the hesitancy of unbelief and the radiant joy and calm of faith.

If doubts and fears should for a moment arise about the reality of the new life of the

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Spirit, such doubts can soon be put at rest. To those reborn, sentence after sentence of the New Testament comes to life in vivid meaning ; the life which lay behind the language meets the same life in a world once more reborn ; phrases utterly unmeaning to an objective theoretic study attain their meaning as hand meets hand across the centuries. To those reborn there comes a similar quick intimacy with those in the present whom God has freed into the life of the Spirit ; while we lived each behind our chosen pose, we were acquaintances of one another but never truly friends ; now, with personalities freed into their natural God-given growth, men of widely different race and nation and class and education meet and understand each other's language, since behind all language they live the same life in Christ. To those reborn, as with conscience freed from the burden of sin they wait in fellowship to hear the Word of God, there comes the ever-new wonder that the one Spirit speaks His different words to different people, and that the different words weave together into one pattern for the accomplish-

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ment by the fellowship of the work of God. From those reborn, there come, sometimes at first in a way at which they themselves are surprised, the fruits of love. If the life of the world, and the life which can stand such tests as these, dispute with one another, as to which has the greater claim to represent fullness of health of mind and soul, we shall not long doubt to which to award the palm.

The most joyful characteristic of the life of the child in its first perfection, and of the life of the man reborn, we have kept till the end, where children keep the things of joy. When the reborn Spirit is present with us in power, we shall know in our hearts a strange intense concentration of vision on the present and the immediate coming moment. Like the child, we shall live with mind unbroken in an ever happy, ever hopeful present. With a true insight, C. E. Montague makes the children in his tale *Rough Justice* pass to the sleep which ends their day with the greeting, 'Good night, fun to-morrow.' What might not happen in the world, if leaders of industry, if the politicians at disarmament conferences, if the ecclesiastics planning for

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prayer book revision or reunion, could go to their rest and go to their labours with this spirit of childlike, care-free, hopeful expectancy in their hearts !

Early in life the divine carelessness of the childlike consciousness is broken. It is necessary that stumbling should come, but woe unto them through whom it comes ! All too soon a hostile world breaks in on the childlike innocence, leads the child to acts of disobedience, and fills the memory of the child with buried acts of shame. All too soon the joy of the child at the imagination of the morrow's pleasure is changed into timid fears for what the morrow may bring forth. There is born in us the fallen consciousness, which flees in rapid incoherence from fear to shame and shame to fear. The mind that was built for concentrated service is distorted and distracted in the vain pursuit of a lost calm. From the hardship of the present our mind flies forward to the future, but shrinks in anxiety at unknown fears which lie ahead ; from future fear it flies back to seek relief in memories of past happiness, yet it dare not explore past memory,

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lest it should bring to light hidden deeds of shame ; from the past it returns again to the present, alternately building a world of phantasy to escape from the cruelty of fact, and called back by the necessities of facts, to seek relief again in phantasy. There comes a moment in life when the love of God is no longer discussed or accepted or rejected as creed or theory, but trusted and heard and obeyed. Before the eyes of the forgiveness of Christ, we know that the past may be explored without shame. Christ has come and has seen and in forgiveness has conquered. We no longer fear to acknowledge before ourselves or before others past failure, because the magnitude of our past sin only serves to enhance the magnitude of His present forgiveness. As we learn to face the past without shame, so also under the providence of God we learn to face the future without fear. Step by step God is guiding and step by step He will guide ; and the assurance of His guiding love and of His infinite resources of power drives from our hearts every fear. Sufficient for this day is the evil of this day, and sufficient for its evil

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is the power of the living Christ to conquer. Once more like the child we let memory explore the past, only to teach us its lessons of the happiness of love ; we let imagination explore the future, only to foresee its possibilities of joy. With our minds cleansed by the healing power of God from every shame and every fear, there comes to us again an intense, qualitatively new enjoyment of the present. With a mind wholly at peace with itself, wholly calm, wholly concentrated in the service of God, we face the immediate coming moment, with all the joy of a child, and all the richness of awareness of a man.

## IV

### STEWARDS

*‘Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither.’*

*‘It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.’*

*‘Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants . . . but . . . friends.’*



## CHAPTER IV

### *STEWARDS*

NAKED we enter the world and naked we leave it. Those two simple facts should be sufficient alone to remind us, that there is nothing in this world which any one of us may call his own possession. Thence we may pass to the majestic themes, that the Creator, to Whom we owe our life, and to Whom at long last, whether we will or no, we must commit our life, created also and owns the world in which He chose to place us. If in this essay we single out and reflect on certain of the most precious of the possessions of God, and ask how we should respond when He entrusts them into our care, it is merely to illustrate the truths that all things are from God, that all things are to be received from Him with thanksgiving, that all things are to be used with the faithfulness of a steward, if and when and as God bids us

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use them. Let us also remember at the outset that as stewards we live from hour to hour at the bidding of our Master. Principles of stewardship, such as are here set forth, may serve to remind us that God is the ultimate Lord of all that we are accustomed to call ours. Principles of stewardship become barriers to separate us from God, if once they are suffered to become unbreakable rules for our behaviour, and if once, living by rule, we cease to listen to the detailed requests of our Master. Principles of behaviour are at best the signposts which point us to the hidden springs, where we may drink from the living guidance of God ; those who have once drunk from the springs will not thereafter think that to sit leaning against the signpost is the best way to quench their thirst.

Time is the creature of God. God, if we let Him, is Lord of every moment of time. The question is not how much of our days we shall set apart for worship or prayer or other religious activities. The question before us is how God would have the whole of His time used for His greater glory and for the service of man, beginning with the

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next half hour in that particular corner of His world in which He has chosen to place ourselves.

God is the ultimate owner of all property. Money, and all the riches of the world which can be bought with money, belong to Him. We shall fall short of the full responsibility of stewardship if we picture first God, then ourselves, and then the various possessions which we claim to own. First in order of ownership comes God. Second come all the varied riches of the world, which all alike belong to God. Third come men as stewards, possessionless, waiting the orders of their lord. Sometimes then the order may come that money which is entrusted to our care be used to bring food or drink or enjoyment to some other person ; sometimes the order may come that money which is entrusted to us be used for our own maintenance or our own recreation. The labourer is worthy of his hire ; the labourer of God has the right to ask for daily bread ; the labourer who is faithful will find that he is granted good measure pressed down of enjoyment from the bounty of God. The

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battle of competitive ownership will cease, and the social order be restored to orderliness, only when God is suffered to call men back to recognise His sovereignty, and when He is allowed to distribute to each man food and drink and recreation as He will.

In the present distorted order of the world there can be no clear principles how those who own property should behave. It is to be expected that the calling of God should come to different individuals in varying ways. To one may come the call to sell all, that he may be freed from all ties of business administration, and free in trusting faith to follow Christ ; to another may come the call to bear the responsibility of riches, in a world where few have yet learnt how riches may be used ; let each obey the voice that is within them, asking only that they may truly discern amidst the babel of conflicting human voices the clear command of God. In the use of money, as in the use of all His gifts, the ways of God are not as those of man. Sometimes with bountiful hand and a thought of comfortable pride at our bounty we distribute our gifts ; God may then break



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in with severe question, asking whether the charitable institution, which pleaded for our generosity lest it die, was not just repressing the life of men with Pharisaic disapproval, and whether it ought not to die, that the life of men might flow free. Sometimes with niggardly hand, and self-congratulation at our parsimony, we deny ourselves or others some simple pleasure; God may then break in with severe question, whether a Puritanical asceticism is really the best way in which we may give Him thanks for His bounty.

‘ The Puritan through life’s sweet garden goes,  
And plucks the thorn, and throws away the  
rose ;

He thinks to please by this peculiar whim,  
The God who framed and fashioned it for him.’

God looks on as ever with patient love, but it is somewhat doubtful if He is pleased.

As guiding principle, a scale of values may serve to check our use of money. First in importance in the work of God is the proclamation of the Gospel of His Forgiveness, which shall change the lives of them that hear it. Second in importance is the maintenance and recreation of body and mind of

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all His children ; if the Kingdom be first sought, the finding of food and drink and clothing for others and for ourselves will follow. Third in importance is the building up of the world in culture, so that the beauty, which God made in the world of nature without men's aid, may be completed by a beauty in the world of human affairs, for which He awaits men's aid. With these ends in view, we shall await the detailed guidance of God, when He would place His money in our hands and how He would have it used.

The God who is Lord of material property is Lord of the material body, which He has created as temple for human souls. In the purity of His vision, every part of the body is pure, and plays its perfect part in the harmony of the whole ; to the fallen eyes of men, nakedness for a moment may seem a thing of shame ; those whose hearts are redeemed into purity can stand before God and man, naked and unashamed. Where the Creator is allowed to reign over the nature He created, there what is good becomes natural to man, and what is natural to man is good.

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The God who created is able to sustain the body in health, where its control is surrendered to His guiding Word. The children of God will expect and receive guidance for times of rest and holiday. On the active service of the work of God the pace is often fast and the discipline severe. We shall not then suppose that the times of service are under His control, and the times of leisure are for us to snatch when we can. We shall acknowledge that He is the Lord of all time, and shall be as strict in hearing and obeying His Word which sends us to rest and recreation, as His Word which calls us back for His work in the world.

God is the Lord of our hours of sleep, not less than of our waking hours. It has been well said that sleep is a kind of forgiveness. The moments immediately before sleep should always be used to commend our sleep to God. Prayer then may be short if we are weary. We shall at least commend the past day to the forgiveness of God ; ask that He will wake us for a new day at His chosen hour ; and ask that He will give us strength, at once on waking, to seek His purpose for

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His new day. Where the day has been lived under the continued guidance of God, despite any pressure of events it will have been free from strain of mind, and sleep will be deep, restful and short. The healthy mind sleeps deep in hours of rest, and is then fully alert through the hours of work. Of fundamental importance for the service of God are the first moments after sleep, when the mind is fresh with the first clarity of dawn. The Spirit through sleep will have brought to the surface of our mind, thoughts of shame where we need forgiveness, and where we may learn new lessons from failure, and thoughts of work to be performed. An all too human voice may make us draw a veil of drowsiness over memories, which it would hurt our pride to face. If we submit to this drowsiness, our weakened mind will be open to the assaults of evil, and we shall come to the day timid, and self-seeking, and still tired. If from the first moment of the day we give its Creator the opportunity to speak to us, we shall often find that when He has drawn aside the curtain of drowsiness, there stand exposed, close to the surface of the mind,

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things uncomfortable to know. We shall, however, then find, that having shown us what He needs to forgive, God in Christ speaks to us His forgiveness, and teaches us new lessons from our failure. With conscience clarified, we shall then hear how, during the coming day, we best may serve His purposes of love. Anxiety and fear will vanish before His word of good cheer. An hour of early morning quiet, thus listening to the ever-varied voice of the Spirit of God, will complete a night of rest, with a refreshment of mind and soul, such as would never come from further hours of unnecessary slumber.

As God is Lord of the body, so also He is Lord of the mind in all its range. The most precious of His gifts with which He entrusts us is the personality, which we so easily mar and prevent from growing up into its perfectly adjusted harmony. First of the faculties of the mind in importance, if not in ordinary use, is the conscience with which we may hear from day to day the will of God. By conscience we do not mean the reflection in the individual of the conventional

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standards of the society in which he lives. We all desire so to act, as to earn the approval of our neighbours : but the name for this desire is not conscience, but the herd instinct. The animal desire to do as does the herd lives on in man ; it plays a useful part in an unredeemed society ; it is valuable that it should on the whole be bad form to be openly selfish or dishonest ; the true voice of conscience, however, far more often bids us defy conventional standards than conform to them. By conscience, we also do not mean the gradually acquired system of ethical principles or the mental portrait of the good life. This acquired ideal again plays its useful part ; it is valuable as a check on wrong action ; it cannot lead to certainty of right action, since each new situation in which man is called to decide and act is unique, and it is impossible to argue from the general to the unique. By conscience in its strict sense we mean hearing the unique intuitional guidance of God for unique concrete situations. In this strict sense it is possible for conscience to become so blunted that we no longer believe in its existence, and can argue it out  
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of existence. If our conscience convicts us of some recurring sin, and if we refuse to heed, and lull it into slumber, we may not complain or be surprised if in other matters the voice of God is hard to hear. There must then break into our lives the cleansing word of Christ, 'Hypocrite, first cast out the beam that is in thine eye, and then thou shalt see clearly.' Those who then suffer Him to forgive, and confess that whereof their conscience is accused, will know from experience, and will not doubt before any human argument, that there is in man a conscience through which God can guide. Step by step the living God guides to the actions which He would have done ; and those who live in fellowship under His guidance find that His one Spirit does not lie, but binds them into an ever closer fellowship of action.

Second of the gifts of God are the powers of rational critical enquiry. There are those who would place them first and who seek to enter head first into the Kingdom of Heaven. Their lives betray their error. They become examples of the ingenuity and

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the futility of one of the inventions of the White Knight. The White Knight was not content with normal methods of passing through gates. 'You see,' he said to Alice, 'I said to myself, "The only difficulty is with the feet; the *head* is high enough already." Now, first I put my head on the top of the gate—then the head's high enough—then I stand on my head—then the feet are high enough, you see—then I'm over, you see.' The White Knight was depressed when Alice suggested that the method might prove a little hard. Those who seek, as did the writer, to enter the Kingdom by amassing more and more knowledge of Christian tradition or modern theological theory, will however find sooner or later that Alice was right. We may learn with our minds with fair accuracy the nature of the lives of those who live beyond, but our own lives will lack their radiant power. Our efforts to join them by turning a somersault over our heads will merely make us a little ridiculous, in the eyes of all who are not engaged in the same pursuit. Sooner or later we shall have to adopt the simple, if



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humiliating, procedure of putting our feet firmly on the ground where they belong, and of opening the latch of the gate as God directs our will. Then with the obedience of faith we shall find ourselves led into the promised territory beyond. We shall, moreover, find, perhaps a little to our annoyance, that others who had entered by the normal method without our learning have not left their heads behind, but are well able to share with us from living experience the truths of Christian theology. This we might have expected from our training. It is, after all, written in the New Testament that they that do the will of God shall know the doctrine of His government ; it is not written, nor is it true to experience, that knowledge of Christian doctrine leads by any inevitable road to obedience with the will.

Where conscience is first obeyed, there will follow an ever greater power and clarity of reason. Like all the gifts of God, reason can be put to either a good or an evil use. Reason can be abused to find reasons, where-with to excuse to ourselves our disobedience of conscience, and then to build up costless

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cobweb metaphysics, wherewith to convince ourselves that conscience did not exist. We disobey the orders of God to rise early for prayer, and find ourselves reasoning that it is most important that people who spend such busy days as do we in the service of God should have long rest. Like Master Fox, we fail to spring into activity to grasp the fruits of joy which God offers us, and so we go on our way contentedly grumbling to ourselves that the grapes would have been sour. The failure of reason to enter the Kingdom, and the abuse of reason to deny the existence of the Kingdom, must not lead us to depreciate the good use of reason. Reason is the second precious gift of God to be used in His service. It is the will of God that we should use to the fullest furthest limits the powers of thought which He has given us. Let those who think that God did not intend them to become masters of clear thinking remember that there is a danger in poverty as in riches, and that it was the servant with only one talent who turned sulky, and buried his one talent in the ground. To one may come the call to

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learn the laws of nature, to another the laws of politics or economics, to another the laws of the working of the human mind, to another the laws of God's dealings with men through the long centuries of Christian tradition ; and each will dedicate their learning to God, and from God will learn how to have it used for leading the world forward into an ever nobler fellowship of love. The one Spirit distributing His several callings will call some to be teachers ; and happy are they who teach, not because they see no other way by which they can as easily earn a living, and not because to fill their minds with irrelevant knowledge is the only way in which they can silence the unrest of their souls, but simply because they have heard and are obeying the Spirit's calling. Where reason is thus the servant of the intuitional conscience, there will come an ever greater clarity of mind, discerning why what is right is also reasonable, and discerning how what is reasonable may best be performed. Those who suppose that the guidance of God and the reason of man are at war, have not yet learnt in obedience

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what the guidance of God means. The truth is rather that where the whole of the personality is integrated in obedience to God, the voice which says what is right and the voice which says what is reasonable are united into the closest harmony, wherein it is impossible any longer to distinguish their separate tones.

The power of memory plays its precious part in the harmony of a personality, at one with itself under the rule of God. It is possible, as most of us know to our cost, for the memory to be filled with past deeds of shame, so that we fear to explore our past. We drive memories which we dare not face deep into the recesses of our soul, instead of allowing them to be purified in the sunlight of human intercourse. Beneath the forgiveness of Christ, and within the concrete forgiveness of the Christian fellowship, the memory is purged of every shame, so that to explore the past is to explore with ever new joy the bounty and the power of God. The dedicated memory then becomes the storehouse of lessons of past divine favour to be used for future service. We shall not linger in the

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storehouse, dwelling in idle enjoyment on the past, when God is calling us to aid some neighbour in the present. The memories of God's past favour, like coins, lose all their value, and become tarnished in our hands, when we shuffle them through lonely miserly fingers ; like coins their value is realised, when God bids us use them in the commerce of human intercourse for the building up of souls. Our neighbour at dinner is doubtless as wearied as are we, with the formal conversation with which he is wont to be entertained, on whatsoever things are unjust and impure in the recent cheap press, and whatsoever things are at the moment peculiarly tedious in our own lives. For his benefit we shall stock our storehouse with whatsoever things are beautiful, lovely and true for the first approach of friendly intercourse. More important, we shall stock the storehouse with lessons of the past action of God in bringing men into the joy of His service, that so our minds are well equipped, in the day when a neighbour in need seeks our aid, as to how he may be led into that joy.

As the power of memory may be dedicated

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to God to learn His lessons from the past, so the power of imagination may be dedicated to explore the possibilities of the reign of God in the future. The divine imagination plays the part of the scout, forging ahead through unknown territory, to explore the path for the advancing army of God. Sometimes as we face the future we may see the prospect of places and people to whom God is sending us, but of whom we are afraid. We shall not then let our imagination become sick in craven fears. In imagination we shall face our fears before the love of God, letting Him show us their reason and their lack of reason, until we realise that under the providence of His guidance perfect love casts out fear. Sometimes we shall allow our imagination to play on the more distant future, foreseeing the possibilities of joyful conquest to which God may later lead us. Then we shall commend the future to His detailed planning, learning from conscience by what path He leads us forward, and whether He chooses to lead us into the promise of joy in these or in other lands.

The deep-rooted instincts, with which God

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has endowed His family, have similar possibilities for perversion into evil or liberation into good, enhanced by the force of all their latent power. The childlike instinct of curiosity drives the mind forward in growth. Fatally easily, the instinct becomes inhibited, or becomes perverted into a curiosity about things which it is profitless to know. C. E. Montague in *Rough Justice* has painted in colours tragically true, the decline of the alert inquisitiveness of the child, through school and college, to the blunt apathy of interest of the man.

The instinct of fear has its valued part in the preservation of life, when it leads us to an alert instantaneous escape from sudden pressing danger. Where the instinct is allowed not merely to preserve life, but to dominate life, there it becomes the great inhibitor of action. Fear makes us miss the one divine moment for instantaneous obedience, in some word or action to aid our fellow men. Fear leads us into the mood of anxious awkwardness, wherein we doubt the strength of God, and doubting Him, lose confidence in ourselves. Worse still, terror with serpent's

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eyes often entices us into the peril which we fear. A buried memory of some moment of fear draws us to return and return to an act which puts us to shame, yet which we lack the power to avoid. In the vision of the Apocalypse, cowards head the list of the damned. To such fears there comes the answer that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. The only being to be feared is He who once created, and He who therefore has power to destroy. When we have learnt this, then we may learn the lesson that Him, whom alone we fear, we need not fear. The love of God is already waiting for us in perfection ; the question is whether we surrender our lives to Him in the perfection of an answering love. If we do so, we shall find that day by day as we face our petty anxieties and worries before Him, He gently unravels them, and leads us to face the future in His service in fearless calm of mind.

✓ Last and most precious of the gifts of God, with infinite capacity for reflecting on earth, it may be the utmost joys of heaven, it may be the ugliest sorrows of hell, are the twin instincts of sex, the desire for fellowship of



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man with woman, and the desire for the creation of children. The gift that is most precious is most delicate. Still in these days, as when St. Paul wrote to Rome, men and women forsake the natural use of the body. Having failed to find from God peaceful purity of soul, they seek satisfaction and find a jarring discord amid the varied impurities of mind and body. The ostrich policy of pretending that sex does not exist, and burying the head in the sands of silence, merely makes worse the battle with unspoken acts of shame. The whole personality becomes sick, as passion blinds reason, warring against conscience. At last, despairing of our power to set our own house in order, we surrender to the government of God, seeking from Him the childlike innocence with which He created us. We are not disappointed. We discover that He who created is powerful to conquer evil, and powerful to reign in perfect beauty in every sphere of His creation. God is the Lord of the body ; where the attraction of the body is subordinate to His realm, He can guide to the natural use of the body. God is the Lord of the instinct ; where He

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reigns, He can lead with steps gentle and smooth and swift into a passion of love, which does not blind, but illuminates the reason. God is the Lord of the mind, and can lead to speech wherewith, in an hour, man and woman can reach deep trustful intimacy in His service. God is the Lord of the soul, and can unite in immediate love those who have loved first Him, and, loving Him, have been willing to receive in His time from His hand love for one another. We speak what we have seen ! As His furthest fullest gift, the God of love sets His Spirit of love in the hearts of men and women. Those who have given their lives in every realm in loyalty as stewards, find that they are adopted as children, and become joint-heirs with Christ of the fullness of the Love and Joy of God.

V

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*'Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it; when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.'*

*'Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother.'*

*'An high way shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness.'*



## CHAPTER V

### *UNDER ORDERS*

GOD is the Lord of our lives, which He created for His purposes of love. God is the Lord of all the material possessions which we are wont to call ours. God is the Lord of our past, and can refashion the evil of the past to make it an instrument for His works of goodness in the future. God is the Lord of our future, and is entitled to send us out as His servants to whatever labour of love He chooses for our steps. God is personal, with a concrete personal will such as we know, faintly reflected in ourselves ; God is free, with the freedom which He has bequeathed to men ; God is living and can act to make His purpose known. A God who lacked a specific concrete will for specific occasions would be less than personal ; we do not magnify God, when we ascribe to Him a will, vague and aloof from detail, but

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when we acknowledge that He is Lord over every detail in the world which He has made.

In early boyhood Christ asked His parents, 'Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?' as though surprised that He should need to ask. Throughout His life it was meat and drink to Him, to receive the Word of God and to obey the Father's will. Faced with the last stern crisis where all would have turned aside, He prayed, 'Nevertheless not what I will but what thou wilt.' As He worked amongst men, He claimed as brother and sister and mother all that should do the will of God. In the obedience of faith, He recognised a kindred spirit in the Roman centurion, who like Him was accustomed to live under authority, receiving and obeying orders. He bade His followers pray to God, 'Thy will be done.' It is evident that man on earth is made to be dependent, not independent; men find their own fullness of life, when they like Christ live as stewards, under orders to the God who created them from heaven. The question therefore which arises is, how shall the will of God be heard?

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For long years on earth we live like men wandering in a strange country, seeking the house which we may call our home. For long we suppose that we know well of ourselves how to find our way, and we wander through the land, unwilling to acknowledge that we are lost. At length the shadows of night begin to fall, and still we have not found the house where we may rest. We come to a cross-roads, where ways part. We know not which way to take ; and if we take the wrong turning, night may enclose us before we have found our home. The promise rings in our ears, and now we are only too anxious to hear it, 'Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying This is the way, walk ye in it.' Yet no passing stranger comes to whisper the welcome words of guidance in our ears.

If we would hear God's will, we must give Him times for our instruction. The faithful servant learns from his Master each new morning how the day shall be spent. Those who at early dawn wait on God, with intensity of longing that His mind shall be known, are not disappointed in their hopes.

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The owl works at night, the lark rises at dawn. There are many people in the world who have at present the character and the temperament of owls, and who imagine that they are predestined, whether by fate, or whether by God, always to have it. Owls are soft, comfortable things by day, in their blinking torpor, but they have nasty habits, and at night as birds of prey they wake to destroy. The character of the lark is far preferable, who regards the dawn, not as a time to slumber, but as a time to soar to heaven, chanting spontaneous songs of praise. There are many people whose morning torpor is not as they think predestined, but is simply the result of hidden fear or sin. The God who fashioned them can, if they let Him, refashion them, to enjoy the temperament not of the owl but of the lark. For a time they may think that they would lack the strength to rise early for prayer and praise. When they have tried it, they will find that the long sleep, which was necessary while their minds were wearied with continual inward conflict, is no longer necessary when they sleep deeply with a mind at peace.



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After a time, they will find that in the life of full service for which God is using them, they would become too weary, unless they rose early to let Him order their days.

As we rise to wait on God and to learn His will, we must surrender all our prejudices before Him. His thoughts are not as our thoughts, and it is His thoughts which we would learn to think. In the days of the war, men pictured the arm-chair critics, visiting the lines in which they had not fought, saying, 'This trench is wrong, it is not in accordance with our map !' Those who have not yet fought under orders to God pace through the world with hardened mind, judging every detail according to the petty plans which their small minds have preconceived. It is not for man in prayer to read his small thoughts into the infinite silence of heaven. It is for man to wait and listen, and to allow the word of God to break through the hardened shell of our prejudices into the silence of our minds.

As we surrender our prejudices to God, so also we must surrender our engagements, so that we allow Him to direct in perfect

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freedom how He would have us spend our day. We shall not start our time of quiet before Him, blocking in the day that lies ahead with all that we have planned to do, and then asking Him how He would have us spend what is left of our time. God is Lord of the whole of our time. If He wills that we should go to apparently fixed engagements, He will send us to them. If He wills that we should break free from them to be used for other work of His, He is able to guide us how without damage to others of His children we may be set free. Of course, under His guidance, we may be at liberty to fill our diaries with engagements for days and weeks and months ahead. We must, however, then each new day allow God to redirect us as His purposes demand. It is men and not God who are fickle ; but where men in revolt live their days by their own changing, selfish wills, God must be also free to adjust His plans to their changing situations, so as best to use those who obey Him, for calling the world back to His service. Let us not say that our lives are too busy with all the feverish labour of our over-organised good

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works, to listen in quiet and to let God guide. Where God guides, He can bring into human activity all the majestic quiet efficiency with which He sends the planets on their courses ; and soon we shall find that our days are so full in His service, that we must let Him order them for us with the unresting, unhasting calm of His rule.

If we would hear the word of God, as we surrender our plans and our prejudices, so also we must surrender all our possessions. All that we treasure most, our homes and our learning and our friendships and our very vision of God Himself, must be laid at His feet for Him to hold or give back as He will. To buy the pearl of great price, we must sell every other pearl. Through long centuries Judaism had learnt to sacrifice to God, tithes of crops, tithes of flocks, their first-born sons, the pride of their nation, the pride of their hearts ; the new life came only when the Chosen One came, who fulfilled the role of sacrifice by offering to God the love of man, His confidence in God, and His very life ; the new life comes only when His followers are content with all that they treasure to be

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crucified with Him, that with Him they may rise to new life. Where we are thus willing to pay the cost of surrendering all, there we shall find that God is amazingly gentle in the cost which He actually demands. He spreads out the cost of our humiliation and obedience day by day, that we may pay a little at a time. It is as though we first said that we would surrender all our lesser pearls for the pearl of great price, and God accepted then our offer, gave us the pearl of great price at once, and said that we need only pay our lesser pearls on the instalment system, one at a time. Yet even with this, the joy of the Kingdom and the generosity of the King have not been expressed. Constantly, God not only gives us the pearl of great price, but He also gives us back our lesser pearls ; He demands that we surrender them to Him, but He merely holds them for a moment to set them on the necklace of the greater pearl, and then gives them back into our hands. We abandon a slavery to the prejudices of our book learning, and we receive back a mind cleansed and purified and for the first time able really to understand. We

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abandon the community of common interest which we misname friendship, and we receive back insight into the real needs of men, and the desire and the ability to heal. We abandon a possessive desire to love and to have the love of another person ; we receive back the greater treasure of a love that is not possessive, but is founded on each side on the rock of the prior love of each for God.

Hardest of all, if we would hear the word of God, surrendering possession and prejudice and plan, we must also surrender our pride. We must let God speak to us of our hidden acts of shame. We must let His Spirit convict us of the deeds which have betrayed His rule. Harder still, we must permit Him to send us, if He will, to tell others of our betrayal. Till we thus surrender our pride, we cannot really pray. Without this surrender, we can only pray, ' God, let me know Thy mind, but for heaven's sake don't let me know what you think about me ' ; or, ' God, let me learn Thy will, but on no account tell me to acknowledge before other men the things of which I am ashamed.'

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It is not surprising that we should feel a certain unreality, a certain formality and restraint in prayer, so long as these are our real prayers. In prayer we must trust, before we experience, the forgiveness and the love of God in Christ. We must believe that the forgiveness of the crucified Christ outreaches our furthest acts of shame. We must trust that God in His love will only send us to actions which, if costly, will nevertheless in the long run prove in accordance with His purposes of love. Then we shall find that here too we cannot overestimate the graciousness of God. Like Christ, we ourselves shall be humbled, making ourselves of no reputation before men. Like Christ, we shall find that the moment of humiliation is but the prelude to the moment of exaltation. Being willing to die with Christ, we shall find that here in this life we are raised to new life with Him.

As we listen to God, we must ever let God speak the words which at the moment He chooses to speak. The catalogue of vain repetitions, with which a world still pagan fills its prayers, is doubtless as tedious to God

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as it is to those who thus pray. The heavenly Father knows our needs! The more important matter is that, unless we learn to listen in quiet, we as men on earth do not know His needs. Politeness, if nothing more, demands that we listen. Of course, as we turn to prayer, we shall come with minds already filled. There will be matters of which we are anxious which we would commend to His care, and acts which our imagination views with fear for which we would have His love prepare us, and questions on which we are in doubt on which we would learn His will. To come to God with our minds dominated with some one question which we would ask Him is, however, to remain a God to ourselves, and not to respect His sovereignty. Always we must allow that God shall first question us about some other action which we have left unperformed, or some secret failure in our lives. We shall approach God in prayer in much the way that an efficient secretary comes to the chairman of a meeting! The good secretary foresees business which may need transacting, and on his side has an agenda

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of work to be done. Always, however, he leaves at the bottom of his agenda the words, 'Any other business.' He then respects the right of the chairman to say, 'No, there is business which you have forgotten, and it is more important than any of the things which you have put down; we will take first this business which I know to need attention.' If we wait on God in prayer with minds rightly filled yet also respectful of His sovereignty, in the same way we shall allow God to say that He has business, which perhaps we were not too anxious to remember, and that this is the business to which we must first attend.

Lastly, if we would learn to be guided by God, we must be willing, where God speaks, however gently, at once to hear and obey. Sometimes His voice is heard, only as one amidst a babel of conflicting human voices. It is as though there were a parliament of the soul. There are voices to represent our love of human praise, and others to represent our fear of human blame, and others which represent our love of comfort, or our desire for a secure income, or our desire never to

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change our mind. Amidst these and other representatives, there is one voice which speaks, sometimes very quietly, sometimes where things are urgent, thundering through the clamour, the voice of conscience, present as representative of God. With God-delegated freedom, the 'I' in each one of us rules as Speaker in the assembly. It is for the Speaker, the inmost being which each one of us calls 'I,' to silence the babel of conflicting voices with the bold verdict, 'One voice and God make a majority.'

In such government, of course, there are dangers. Of course it is dangerous to proclaim the doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of the guidance of God over all other voices. There is a danger that some will use this doctrine to excuse, to themselves and to others, their obedience to a voice which was anything but divine. There is a danger of a diseased, hypersensitive conscience. It is quite possible, and not unusual, for people to evade the voice of conscience where God is really speaking, and to cover their evasion by becoming over-conscientious about some other irrelevant, entirely trivial matters.

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Still, in these days, men labour irrelevant matters of food and drink, conscientious about kindness over not eating animals, to excuse themselves for their unkindness to men in their homes. There is no doubt that sometimes God guides us, as He guided the first apostles, to visit a place or travel by a certain route, that so we may meet some person whom He knows, and whom we cannot know, to be there needing our help. An over-sensitive conscience may then take the facts of such guidance, and labour to discern by what routes to travel, when perhaps the real voice of God is speaking of work to be done at home, and we are shirking some task which lies immediately to hand. If, however, we really discern the dangers of a hypersensitive conscience, we shall be standing in all humility at the side of those who suffer from this infirmity, seeking ourselves from God how we may aid them ; we shall not be proclaiming from proud pedestals that we disapprove of the methods of those who wait in quiet on God. To listen to the voice of God in conscience has its dangers, but they are infinitesimal, compared

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with the dangers which beset a world which goes its selfish way, and does not hear and obey the guiding voice of God.

To those who do listen, the promise is sure, seek and ye shall find. At first the voice of God may come to us quietly, and be hard to discern. If we have long silenced a voice which spake of some long-standing sin, it is not surprising that now we find that voice hard to hear. We shall, however, not doubt the reality of the guidance of the living God, because at first we do not find it easy, immediately to bring our own lives under divine control. As we listen and trust and obey the Word of God to ourselves, we shall find that we receive His guidance over an ever increasing field, and find His guidance ever easier to discern. We shall soon find that there are ready signs of the seasons when He is speaking, and of the seasons when we are wandering from our way, following some false human voice. We shall find as we obey, that sentence after sentence of the New Testament springs into light and life, as we now live the life which first gave birth to its letters. We shall find

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that increasingly reason follows as hand-maid of conscience, discerning why what was right was also reasonable. We shall find that the guidance of the one living Spirit to ourselves concurs with His guidance of others in the Christian fellowship, and that we can check our guidance with theirs. We shall find that to obey the day to day guidance of the Spirit of God is to be led step by step into the life of absolute purity and honesty and love.

As we go on our way, led by the hand of God, the morning hour of quiet, which once was a formal human labour, will become enriched into a time of pure divine joy. God will show us acts in the past which betrayed His purpose, and will teach us the cause of our betrayal. God will lead us to acts of restitution, whereby we may both be freed ourselves from the sickness of sin, and may be witness to others of His saving power which thus freed us. God will point out His detailed orders for our day, leading us to acts, which appear at first trivial, but which will later be seen as the first step in some modern miracle of love. Ours must be the

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obedience of the last least soldier, ready for immediate obedience, whether or not we have ourselves been told the whole wide plan in which our obedience has its part.

It is a custom to be commended, that those who thus seek to receive instruction from God in quiet should take pencil and paper, and write down the thoughts to which His Spirit leads. If any feel superior to the use of such material aids, they may well question whether God also is convinced that they do not need them. The custom of writing slows the rapid pace of wandering thoughts, that the voice of the Spirit may be heard ; it enables us the more surely to remember His lessons, and to see that His requests are performed. We need not fear lest some of the thoughts we write are all too human. Doubtless they will be. In the clear light of day, God will show us, where He is using the powers of our mind to speak His Word, and where He is reminding us of human thoughts, which were contrary to His love. If we have an anxiety on our mind, or a difficult decision to be taken, we may do well to let the Spirit show us every associated thought ; He

will draw up our thoughts like the drag-net, and clarify our mind, by preserving every thought which came from His inspiration, and by casting away every thought which came from unworthy motives. As we thus listen to Him, we shall learn from God many lessons concerning His government of our soul ; and we may well record these lessons under headings, that later we may use them for aiding others. If we have a page in our note-book headed Self, we shall gradually find that every compound of Self in the dictionary finds its place on it, as God shows us step by step the causes of our revolt against Him. Early in such a book of lessons we shall do well to place the reminder, that the Spirit is not bound by rule or precedent, but that His voice must be heard afresh each new day. As we are used by God to lead others into the joy of honest love (and we shall very severely question before Him our own love, until we are so used !), we shall share in fellowship with others day by day every thought which God has thus given, the memories of shame He has needed to forgive, the lessons He has

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taught us through failure, the new deeds of love He has given us to perform. Life will become a thrilling adventure, as in fellowship with those we love, we thus await what new lessons from God each new day may bring.

As we learn in the early hour of quiet to hear and obey God's guiding voice, so increasingly we shall find that His promise is fulfilled, and we hear throughout the day a word behind us, saying 'This is the way.' From hour to hour we shall hear His voice in ever greater clarity, bidding us to the next step which He would have us take in His works of love. Sometimes, as we seek to aid a neighbour at our side, from moment to moment we shall hear God instruct us in his need, so that we know when to be silent, when to rebuke, when to confess, when to encourage, when to exhort.

As our lives become from day to day and hour to hour set in a Christ-like obedience to the ever-new guidance of God, God will lead us away from the softer paths of the plains, on to the high mountain ridges with their bracing air and sweeping view. We shall tread the precipice ridge, with dangers

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of a false humility on the one side, and dangers of a false pride on the other, and we shall walk, joyful and fearless, confident in the guiding hand of God. It will happen then that from time to time we stumble and for a moment fall. We shall slip from the highway down the steep slope, and become bruised on the sharp stones. Old fears and old failures may return which we thought to have left behind. We shall learn in such moments, instantly to return and to seek the help of our guide. We shall find that He is strong at once to rescue. Step by step He will show us how to climb, that we may reach once more the ridge. He will show us where and why we fell, that another time we may tread without stumbling by the same place. Thus we shall walk, unafraid despite the heights, rejoicing in the heights, under divine orders along the highway of God.



## VI

### THE GREAT ILLUSION

*'Forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you.'*

*'If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar.'*

*'He that is bathed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit :...ye also ought to wash one another's feet.'*



## CHAPTER VI

### *THE GREAT ILLUSION*

THE Son of God comes from glory in heaven at the right hand of God. He descends to earth. He dwells on earth in humble form, first in a manger, then in a carpenter's shop. The crowds which first flocked to Him forsake Him. The religious leaders condemn His works as diabolical. He is brought to the point of death. He dies the death of a common thief. Forsaken by all, He dies with a cry of despair.

The followers of Christ are called by Him also to bear a cross. As He comes to minister, they also must minister. As He kneels in the dust to wash His disciples' feet, they also must kneel. His first great follower writes to other followers. 'Have this mind in you which was in Christ Jesus, who made Himself of no reputation, and being found in fashion as a man humbled Himself.'

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The followers of Christ start not from the glory of heaven but from the sinfulness of men. Where Christ even in His perfection did not snatch at equality with God, they may not claim a perfection which is not theirs. The followers of Christ acknowledge in full concrete detail the sinfulness which is their nature as men. They suffer themselves to be forgiven by Him. Peter lets it be known in the Christian fellowship that he had betrayed his Master in the one moment of need, and that, nevertheless, Christ had called him back to new service with a look. The followers have been humiliated under the Cross ; and henceforth their sins become, not things which it hurts their unbroken pride to acknowledge, but things which bear witness to the magnitude of the forgiveness of their Master, that He can love and forgive and use such men as they. Once the scales of our own pride have fallen from our eyes, we shall see that the New Testament speaks constantly of the open acknowledgement in the Christian fellowship of the sins which have needed forgiveness. If we confess not our sins, we

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make Him a liar. If from the Cross we go on our way, pretending before men that the cry of forgiveness had no relevance for our lives, then we give the lie to that forgiveness. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. The forgiveness of which the New Testament speaks is something which happens, something which results in an effective cleansing of the personality from the sins of which it was ashamed ; and this result follows only where we are humiliated, and acknowledge in concrete detail that it was and is necessary that we should be cleansed.

The children of men start from sin, and conceal their sin, and seek to veil their sin behind an outward cloak of piety. The lives of men before one another consist in trying to keep up an appearance of purity and love, which is not true to their hearts. Even the supposed disciples of Christ base their lives on a text which they will not find in His Scriptures, 'Except ye keep up an appearance of godliness, ye cannot be as the gods.' The very language of the Cross is

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used as an outward cloak of piety. Men hide the secret resentments and impurities of their hearts behind an outward profession of faith in Christ. We hang a crucifix on our walls, and evade bearing the cross of humiliation in our lives. The Christ suffers over our heads in a humiliation which He did not deserve. We underneath play dice for His raiment, that we may cloak ourselves with pious phrases about Him, and so evade bearing from men the humiliation which we do deserve.

Between the religion which faces in open realism the sin of fallen human nature, and the religion which conceals the facts of secret sin behind a pretence of piety, there is no peace, but a sword. The former religion is Christianity. The latter religion is Pharisaism, and it remains Pharisaism, however much it may deck itself with Christian practice and Christian phrase. It is the great illusion of mankind that health of soul consists in burying the things of shame within the depths of the personality, instead of bringing them out into the open sunlight of God, where all things become pure. It is

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this illusion which springs from the pride of man, in keeping up an appearance of a righteousness which is not his. The illusion still flourishes in Christendom, since pride still flourishes. It is this illusion from which Christ came to save the world.

An African folk-tale tells that God first made man perfect within and without. The devil, passing, breathed on man, and made him unclean. Man was then turned inside out. It is for this reason that man is so dirty inside ! What is true of the body is true of the soul. As first created by God, the infant has a transparent purity of soul. In earliest childhood, how early who can say, the devil passes by. Fear and pride and self-will enter in. The child becomes ashamed and fears to confess its shame. The evil by the great illusion is buried deep within the personality. The poison of repressed fear or shame festers in the depths of the soul. Then there must come the healing work of God. Man must be converted, not with an empty change of opinions, but with the turning inside out of his life. Sins must be confessed openly on the lips,

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that they may be purified in God's fair air, and that so there may be room for His gift of love and peace within the newly cleansed heart.

In more close realism the natural working of the body is a parable of the proper natural working of the soul. It may happen that the body takes into itself some food that was poisoned. The natural instinct of the body is then by every means to eliminate poison from the system. If the body is sick from poison, the wise doctor will aid it to expel the poison. Let us suppose that a doctor were so foolish as to confuse his drugs. Let us suppose that he came to a patient who was poisoned, and administered a narcotic which should lull the nerves of the body into inactivity. The poison would remain in the system and make the patient more ill. The doctor would bewail the patient's rising fever and administer more narcotic. The body would be drugged into further inactivity, and the poison would pursue its fatal work. Would the onlookers then say, 'How dear and kind a doctor ; he spares his patients every discomfort ; his patients



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are never made sick as are the patients of other doctors ? ' The onlookers would say that such a doctor was a fool, who ought to be expelled from his profession. For long generations the doctors of the soul have been administering narcotics, when what the soul needed was the momentary cost of a purge. In a fallen world all men grow up with poison in their soul, and sooner or later must be converted and cleansed. The Church which is truly Christian will not rest content with an external piety, which can be won at little cost, and which brings as little reward ; it will proclaim that men must pay the utmost cost, even to the breaking of their pride, that so they may receive the utmost reward, the gift of the Spirit, in temples made ready for His presence.

The great illusion of laying before the world an outward show of beauty, and concealing within the heart the ugly facts of sin, may be illustrated with one more parable. I have seen a skilled conductor bring a crowd of people with untrained voices to sing in a quarter of an hour, with full strength and no small beauty, carols whose tunes were diffi-

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cult and at first entirely unknown to them. The conductor liberated the people from their inhibitions against being able to sing, by saying, 'If you have got a good note in you, sing it ; if you have got a bad note in you, get it out.' Always the leaders of religion evade themselves, and teach others to evade the second part of that counsel. There is heard in the world many a pious platitude about forgiveness, but no clear plain speaking about the concrete sins which Christ has actually needed to forgive. As a result, for lack of the reality of forgiveness, the world languishes in feebleness of faith. Let the world but give to God, to use as He will, not only the pious halves of personality, but the whole of personality, and all will be changed. The secret thoughts of shame, and the secret memories of sin, will become fair in God's choir, as they are sung to bear witness to the fullness of His conquering love. Out of the very wrath of man against God there will come a chorus of song, wherewith in full boldness of faith a world newly courageous will sing to His praise.

Of course, the open acknowledgement of

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sin is costly, and all men shrink from it. It does hurt our pride to recognise in full frankness the kind of people that at heart we are. It is just for this reason that open confession of sin is necessary, for it is only this that makes us realist in facing sin. We shall not blatantly speak of sin on every occasion ; we shall seek the guidance of God, when to be silent, and when to speak that our own souls may be cleansed, and when to speak that another soul may be aided himself to be realist. Nevertheless, unless we are willing to speak of our own sin, we have not really taken to ourselves the fact of forgiveness. We may claim to have received forgiveness for our private sins in private prayer ; we have merely indulged in a sentimental enjoyment of private piety, unless we are able when God bids, thereafter to witness to the forgiveness of Christ, by saying in concrete detail what in us He has had to forgive. If we dare not thus face our neighbour, we have not claimed the forgiveness of Christ.

To confess is to bear the cost, ourselves, of being made of no reputation before men, and men shrink from this cost with every

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argument which can be found. Men say that this breach of reticence is against British temperament, as though the pride of keeping up imaginary appearances were any monopoly of the British. Men say that to reverse the normal processes of life by confession is dangerous, as though it were not far more dangerous to leave the poison of sin festering in the soul. More strangely, those who themselves dare not face it accuse others of enjoying the humiliation of open acknowledgement of their failure.

Two arguments against the open acknowledgement of sin in the Christian fellowship deserve longer consideration. It is sometimes said that the Church in the past repudiated public confession ; and it is then affirmed by one school of thought in the Church, that the privacy of the confessional provides all that is needed, for the realist facing of sin. If those who thus speak know in experience the real release from sin, so that old sins perish out of the personality, and the conscience is refined to face new obedience to God ; if they further know in experience not only the change in their own

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lives, but the fullness of power which their Master would have them have to change others, then by their fruits of love let them be known. If the confessional does not prove itself by these fruits, then we must be pardoned for pointing out certain greater costs, and certain greater results, where there is open acknowledgement of sin. The confessional stops short of the full cost by the very reason of its privacy. If I confess my sin behind the closed doors of the confessional, I can feel that my sin is known only to one man, and that his lips are sealed. The open acknowledgement of sin in the Christian fellowship involves the far greater humiliation that all around me, even the very people with whom I work, know that of which I was guilty. The cost is so great, that I may say that for the very sake of effective Christian work, I should not let people know by how very imperfect a disciple the work is being done. Unfortunately, I must remind myself that my Master did not say, 'Except ye keep up an appearance of righteousness, ye cannot be my disciple,' but 'Except ye take up your cross.' With its greater cost

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the open confession is productive of greater fruits. The sin which has been thus acknowledged ceases to burden the conscience and its power is broken. Before I confess, the sin looms dark ahead as a thing of shame, of which it hurts my pride to speak, but whose strength endures. After I have confessed, the sin appears as a disease, for whose first start I was responsible, and for which I must therefore make restitution, but whose heavy burden Christ Himself has pitied and borne and cured. Moreover, the sins which are thus confessed and cured become positive assets for the work of Christian evangelism. My sin is in concrete fact so far redeemed, that it now tells of the praise of God, and leads others to praise. I speak of Christian piety, and others regard me as one of the pious unapproachables, from whom they must conceal their real lives. I speak in concrete detail of the sins which in me Christ has conquered, and the world finds courage to face the sins which I have faced, and asks, whence then comes this healing power.

As one school of thought evades the cost  
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of open humiliation with the confessional, so another school seeks to cover the same evasion, by claiming to possess a more orthodox theology of the Cross. Again by their fruits let them be known ; if they bear greater fruits as liberating and not repressive agents in changing people's lives, from these also we will gladly learn. Meanwhile the questions must be asked in all earnestness, would Christ on the Cross require us to hold and repeat correct words about the work which He there accomplished ? Or, would He hope that we should ourselves face the cost of humiliation, in order that we might afterwards receive the joy of the gift of the Spirit ? We will hear the complaint that we have not got a correct theology of the Atonement, when the complaint comes from those who will share with us the knowledge of the sins which in them Christ has had to forgive, following His bidding of taking the Cross not on to their lips, but into their lives.

One word more must be said to those religious leaders who decry the open facing of sin. We do not condemn ; we ask that

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they be certain that their own heart does not condemn them. Let them be sure that they have received in fuller measure the gift of the Spirit of joy and peace, than have those others whom they criticise for open sharing of sin. Let them be sure that their Master is using them with greater effect, really to liberate the lives of those around them from the power of sin. Let them be sure that it is no secret voice of pride which holds them back from bearing witness to the forgiveness of Christ, by acknowledging what in them Christ has forgiven. Let them beware lest others, for whom they are responsible, evade the cost and miss the joy of facing sin in their own lives, by saying that it is not a practice of which these leaders approve. Let them beware lest in this modern world there falls on them the condemnation, not from us, but from the living Spirit of Christ, 'Ye enter not into the kingdom of heaven yourselves, and them that are entering ye hinder.'

With this, let a few words of counsel be given, to those that are ready to receive it, with regard to the practice of acknowledging



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before others in full honesty the secret facts of our own lives. Here, as always, the methods of God are both gentle and reasonable. First there comes the facing in private of the Cross, the surrender of all into the hands of Him from whom we received all, the willingness to be guided by His living Spirit. Those to whom the practice of open acknowledgement of sin is strange, will generally find that the Spirit first bids them acknowledge matters which it is not of very great cost to confess. It is customary, if we would empty poison from a bottle, first to remove the cork. The relief which will come from the confession of some trivial matters which are weighing on our conscience will be considerable, and the habit will grow.

Sooner or later, when we are ready to receive it, the Spirit will lead us to a deeper sharing of all that has been weighing on us from the past. It is a healthy practice for everyone, when they are led by God to do so, to share to the depths whatever in the past has most burdened their memory with thoughts of guilt. Such deep sharing may

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often be of things of which it is a shame to speak in public, and it will be right to accept the guidance of the Spirit, and to share with some one older individual. Such an individual will then stand to us as ambassador of the forgiveness of Christ. In a Church which was fully Christian the natural person to whom to take such confession would be the priest. Whether in the actual Church the priest is always the right person is questionable. He might be shocked ; and that might be good neither for him nor for us. The person who receives such confession must be someone who has learnt from his own experience, both under the Cross and in the Christian fellowship, that the forgiveness of Christ outreaches the furthest sin of man. He will therefore never be shocked ; before the utmost evil he will say without blame, as Christ would say : ‘ Thy sins are forgiven ; go and sin no more.’

With this deep sharing there will come a great relief of soul, and a great clarity of mind and conscience. The conscience, taught by the Spirit, will then, day by day, discern new failures, and the sins of self which

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caused them. The house has been spring-cleaned ; it is now necessary simply to dust it each morning from the dust of the day. He that is bathed needeth not thereafter to be bathed again, but needs only to wash his feet from dust collected on the day's march. As Christ goes on to point out, this daily cleansing must be done, not only by Him, but within the fellowship. Day by day, we shall acknowledge before the Christian fellowship the faults wherein we have been convicted of failure. We shall not for a moment adopt the pernicious doctrine that there are any such things as private sins. We shall know that any sin whatever inhibits our power for effective Christian work, and is therefore a sin against the fellowship, in whose work we are one member. It will save time for others if we learn, quickly and clearly, to acknowledge the one thing whereof our conscience most deeply accuses us, and which therefore it is hardest to acknowledge, for it is that which will cleanse us. With this daily acknowledgment of sin, there will come a daily clarifying of conscience, to discern the requests of

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God, and to learn the new lessons of His government. If we are not living in a Christian fellowship, wherein such daily sharing is possible, God will keep us in safety without it. The other side must then also be said. If we have learnt with such sharing to receive the gift of the Spirit of joy in our hearts, we shall not be long left as isolated individuals without Christian fellowship, for God will send us to share our joy, and change the lives of others into joy, and thus to build up a Christian fellowship around us.

The open acknowledgement of sin will then be used, not only for our own liberation from sin, but for proclaiming to others the good news of forgiveness. We must in the first instance share our sins before we are fully released from their power, for it is in the sharing that forgiveness is completed. The forgiveness of Christ, when faced in concrete realism, heals our sin ; the forgiveness lays on us then a claim for restitution and witness, and we only find the full power of His forgiveness, as we hear this claim and obey. Under His guidance, we shall speak in concrete detail of the sins which He has

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shown us and forgiven, and we shall then find that He breaks the power of the latent fear or pride or selfishness, which produced these sins. We shall not then in any morbid form brood over past failure. Others, who as yet resent the suggestion that sin should be faced, may accuse us of doing so, but we shall not take their criticism too seriously. Sin is a morbid subject of enquiry, only for those who are as yet too proud to confess. From time to time, the Spirit may lead us to take again upon ourselves the full responsibility for our past failure, but we shall find that thus to acknowledge ourselves as sinful is to receive new vision of the joy of the forgiveness of Christ. From time to time the Spirit will lead us to speak of our past failure, but He will do so in order to lead us to the joy of aiding others, who as yet are fighting losing battles. In public witness, we shall speak in general terms of those moral conflicts which in us Christ has conquered, in order to give to others the assurance of His power to conquer. Those who are battling with these conflicts will then know that we are human, and shall understand their need

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and not judge or blame ; they will ask us whence comes the power of conquest. By speaking in private witness in fuller detail of our own past failure, we shall lead them to face and take the responsibility for their failure ; by speaking in full assurance of the power of Christ, we shall lead them to surrender their lives to His all-conquering power.

The Good Shepherd leads the personality of each of His followers like a flock of sheep. When all is well, the flock follows in close compact order, as a single whole. The roadside has, however, its dangers. All too easily one of the flock takes fright and breaks away. The unity of the rest of the flock is disturbed, and they begin also to break apart. A single sheep may run in fright from the flock. It would be vain to pursue the sheep with cries of rebuke, for these would but drive it further in flight from the flock. The Good Shepherd has at His feet sheep-dogs, obedient, gentle and swift. Quietly they outrun the wandering sheep. However far it has gone, they can outreach and outflank it and bring it back to the flock. Thus by their labours the unity of the flock is restored.

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The flock represents the integrated personality of man. All too easily the personality becomes divided against itself. Man can no longer speak the word 'I' in public behind the whole of his personality ; at one time he says 'I' openly behind his thoughts and acts of piety, and at another time a different 'I' thinks and acts in ways which he dare not confess. It is as though a part of the personality had broken away, and now runs ever further from the fold. Under the Cross, we know that however far man falls, the forgiveness of God in Christ out-reaches the fall, and desires only to heal. The leaders of the Christian religion are the watch-dogs of Christ on earth. Happy are they if, at the moment of His bidding, they be found, not wolves driving the errant sheep yet further from the fold, but collies, gentle and swift and strong, out-reaching in forgiving love, and restoring to childlike unity of consciousness, the broken personalities whom He would have them heal.





## VII

### *SYMPTOM AND SIN*

*'Cast out first the beam out of thine own eye ; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.'*

*'Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven ; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.'*

*'The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace.'*



## CHAPTER VII

### *SYMPTOM AND SIN*

‘THE fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace . . .,’ yes, and all the other qualities of a life purged of pride and fear, and childlike in its purity. In the Christian community, love and joy and peace are no longer the goal of an anxious, earnest striving ; they are the first-fruits of a life reborn. The new life combines the beauty of character of an angel with the clarity of mind of a serpent and the spontaneity of a child. All the essential Christian qualities can only exist in spontaneity. Love is the spontaneous outgoing of one heart in affection toward another ; there is no such thing as an ordered love ; to offer an outward show of kindliness under a sense of duty is not love but hypocrisy. We do not show love to another person by slamming the doors of our heart in their face, hanging a placard with terms of endearment

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outside the door, and nursing thoughts of resentment and hatred behind it. Joy is the spontaneous happiness of the heart, or it is not joy. Experience tells us only too surely the difference between a heart that is truly happy from within, and a heart that conceals an inward pain behind a pretence of outward gaiety. A house is not made happy, either for its owner or for his guests, by hanging tinsel in the hall and neglecting the drains. So it is with peace. The peace of God which passeth understanding is a deep harmony of soul, wherein every shame has been cleansed by the assurance of divine forgiveness, and every fear cleansed by the trust in the divine providence. This inward harmony is richly effective in action. It has nothing in common with the studied apathy of the sullen, nor with the laboured peace of the quietist in flight from the world. Love and joy and peace are the natural characteristics of a nature reborn in Christ, and it is essential to their Christian character that they should be effortless and unstrained.

This, the life of natural, effortless love and joy and peace, is the Christian standard.

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Everything which falls short of this is either sin, or symptom of sin. By symptom, we mean something not less evil than sin, but not itself an ultimate cause. It is our present purpose to distinguish between sin and symptom. The distinction is clearly important, for to treat symptoms and ignore their cause is to invite the recurrence or continuation of the disease. To attain the fullness of Christian health for ourselves or for others, it is necessary to recognise symptoms and discern the sins which cause them, that so we may suffer the sins to be forgiven and cured. The cure must begin with ourselves. So long as our own conscience is burdened with a sin, which we have not allowed Christ to forgive and cast out, we shall not be able to discern in their right evaluation the sins of others. On the other side, the promise is there, 'First cast out the beam, and then thou shalt see clearly.' In the Christian fellowship the promise is fulfilled ; to those whose own soul is cleansed from sin there comes the clarified conscience, which is able to discern the sins of others, and to be used by God to lead them into health.

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The most evident symptom of sin is that which is writ large in the social and international and industrial order. War, unemployment, bad housing, armaments, the toll of the road, all of this and more is symptom of the sin of a fallen world. We would desire the reformation of these and other abuses in social and industrial life, as fully as the most ardent socialist or communist. Because of the very strength of our desire for their reform, we would, however, refuse to make a direct attack on such abuses. Here, most of all in the post-war years, it has been evident that there is no cure for ill-health by treating symptoms. Cause after cause has begun with a noble idealism ; has evaded the issue how the idealism may be something more than a feeble complaint that the world is not as we like it, and may be translated into effective action ; has degenerated into a futile discussion of futilities ; and has finally languished to death. There will be no abiding cure for war by a direct attack on disarmament, while the deeper causes of international distrust remain uncured ; there will be no abiding cure for unemployment,

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until those engaged in industry are liberated into new vision and new generosity and new courage. The churches, which ought to have been checking at its starting point the descent into the futility of human compromise, have been involved in it. They have thought that they could solve their own pressing problem of disunion by engaging in common social tasks, and have evaded their lack of a common faith, without which all else is frustrated. The resulting depression, alike in social and ecclesiastical fields, is at last bringing men once more to realise that there can be no solution of our discontents except in facing their real cause. Once more the prodigal world has been allowed to visit the country of estrangement from God, and once more it is beginning to find that the far country is desolate, and that life is preferable at home. Once more men are beginning to discover, that before the God of love can reign in the social order, He must be allowed to reign in individual lives.

As we turn from the social order to the lives of individuals who are in it, we shall

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find the first symptom of sin on the surface of normal human consciousness, in the worry and the fever and fret which inhibit effective action. Whether in the smaller circles of personal relationships in family and home, or in the wider circles of industry and politics, fellowship is frustrated by the petty fears and anxieties and suspicions which dominate men's minds. It is the favourite device of the devil to lure us into complacency with such loveless lives, by persuading us that the worry and the resentment which distort our vision are not a symptom of sin, but are a permanent part of our temperament. There may be some people whom we feel that we simply cannot like. There may be some whose mannerisms cause us a continual petty sense of irritation. We may have in our hearts a continual anxiety for our own future, or for the future of those whom we love. We may be nervous or self-conscious in the presence of strangers or in the presence of friends, or if ever we are called to speak in public. Such petty irritations and fears we shall probably accept and assume to be an inevitable part of our nature. We are



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right. They are inevitable to our present nature, and no effort on our part will remove them. To blame, or to seek to repress irritation or anxiety, is merely to make it the worse. Nevertheless, these things are not a part of the nature of a child, nor are they a part of the nature into which God intended us to grow. They fall short of the standard of fearless, spontaneous love, and as such are symptoms of sin, with which the devil may make us complacent, but which God can remove. The standard is clear ; anything in life which keeps me from the fullness of the love of God, or which keeps me from bringing my neighbour to God, is evil, and can and must be exposed, forgiven and cured.

As there are symptoms of sin in the heart, so there are also symptoms in the mind, which are also not as permanent as we are wont to suppose. Our memory may be weak along certain specific directions. Our thoughts may be continually incoherent and unclear. We may lack the intellectual power, really to study a subject and make it our own, and to aid others with knowledge

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which God had bidden us acquire. We shall then probably accept the fact that we have not been blessed with an acute intellect ; and we shall perhaps publicly praise, and privately envy or even pity, those whom we regard as having more of learning and less of common sense than ourselves. Thus does the devil once more lull us into complacency with ineffectiveness. We shall say to ourselves and to others that men are given variety of talent, and that intellectual ability is not a talent with which we have been endowed ; we shall not be so quick to ask, whether the reason that our talent does not increase is not that we have buried it in the ground. A little experience may, however, soon convince us that muddled thinking is all too often merely an easy device, with which a sick mind hides from itself a secret sense of guilt. I listen to the guiding purpose of God and obey, and immediately my mind functions as a keen tool in the service of His will. I hear a claim on my will and disobey ; and as I turn to other things, my mind becomes filled with incoherent, wandering thoughts, with which it seeks to hide from

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itself the uncomfortable sense of a disobeyed conscience. This weakening of mental vision and acuteness as a result of a disobeyed conscience is true on a far wider scale. The child is endowed with an immensely strong natural curiosity, and with a mind quickly and readily receptive to new knowledge, and well equipped to order into coherent form the knowledge which it receives ; if, in later life, the curiosity and the ability to reason is checked, as in greater or lesser measure it always is, the cause is that fear has entered in and inhibited the use of the talent. Again it is vain to blame or treat symptoms. Often enough, here as in other spheres, the individual is bearing the cost of the sin, not of himself, but of the society in which he lives. We cannot compel ourselves or others to have an acute mind or a receptive memory by any deliberate effort ; we can but acknowledge before God that anything less than a child-like vigour of mind is symptom of sin, and search deeper for the cause and cure.

From the superficial symptoms of worry and poverty of mind, to which far too little attention is commonly given, we pass to the

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grosser evils, to which far too much attention is commonly given. Adultery, drink and gambling, these are the sins without forgiveness in the eyes of a respectable world. To the eyes of faith they are evils, somewhat more serious perhaps than worry or resentment, but still of a very minor order, and certainly symptom, not sin. They are just the varied ways in which a varied world, having once evaded the claim of God, now seeks to evade His forgiveness, and to flee from the knowledge of hidden shame. Adultery, and with it all forms of the perversion of the sexual instincts, may be dealt with very gently, as Christ dealt with them, and as the self-righteous Pharisees of all ages do not deal with them. Sexual abuse springs from the perverted growth of a very beautiful and very delicate desire. Those people are to be very greatly loved, very greatly pitied, and very gently cured, who seek to escape from the hard claims of an unfriendly world, by finding a false comfort in perverted outlets for the sexual instinct. They are more sinned against than sinning. With the quite appalling inefficiency of sexual education

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in the modern world, it is small wonder that for countless numbers the sexual desire does get in greater or lesser measure perverted, and turned into distorted channels. The pure in heart can see life naked and unashamed ; they can therefore educate others in full simplicity in the facts of our bodily and mental nature, and in the possibilities, both of their natural and their perverted use. Those who are themselves in a measure impure, having a secret shame in their own heart, tell the growing generation the facts of sex, as though it were a subject of which it is an unfortunate duty to speak, but concerning which it is a shame to enquire too fully. Thus there is handed on from generation to generation an entirely false sense of shame, which inhibits the rightful curiosity of the growing mind to know to the full the facts of its own nature, and which for vast numbers of people perverts the instincts into the landslide of sexual abuse. Here above all it is vain to treat symptoms, and scandalous to blame symptoms. ‘ Let him that is without sin cast the first stone ! ’ If natural growth has been checked. and the

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field of sexual instinct and curiosity has become a matter of moral conflict, it is impossible to resolve it by a direct attack on that conflict. Very gently, as one nourishing a precious and tender plant, we must seek the deeper cause of the conflict. We surrender a damaged life to the living Christ ; and we then find that if we submit in all things to His guidance, His living Spirit is strong to mend and to heal.

Drunkenness and gambling, like the sins of sex, serve as a cloak for hidden fears, and are symptoms of sin, rather than themselves sin. The child, fearless and shameless, finds its joy in the excitement of the coming moment of work or play. Fallen man, afraid of his memories of the past, afraid of what the future may bring forth, is yet more afraid of facing in full realism the real nature of the world in which he lives in the present. Inevitably then he seeks some means of escape, by which for a time he may lull his anxious mind into a temporary excitement or a temporary ease. Drink and gambling, cinemas and detective stories, these are the means by which he seeks to find in a world

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of phantasy, the joy which the child could, and he can no longer find in the world of fact. Those who seek these methods of escape are more to be pitied than blamed, more to be healed than judged. Above all, those have no right to judge them, who are themselves at heart seeking to escape from reality by a use of narcotics, and who are merely substituting the ritual of religion for the ritual of the racecourse, and the false comfort of pious thoughts for the false comfort of cinema captions. Narcotics, of course, have their use. If a pain of heart cannot immediately be cured, it is sometimes right to lull it into slumber. In an unredeemed world it is necessary to secure that the narcotics which men adopt shall not poison their neighbours as well as themselves. For this end, a narcotic religion may seem better than drink or adultery, and detective stories better than either. Nevertheless, it is the task of a real Christianity, not to experiment in rival methods of narcotics, but to search deeper, and to cure the deeper unrest at heart. Drink and gambling are wasteful evils ; but they will be cured,

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not when devout, joyless people protest that they are shocking, but when those who have discovered the secret of Christian joy offer to the joyless a more excellent way.

Religion, even the most lofty, spiritual religion, even the most simple, quietist religion, even the religion which professes most loudly its faith in the saving power of Christ, may remain no more than a narcotic, drugging instead of curing a sick soul ; if so, religion is one of the more serious symptoms of sin. Our previous statement was inaccurate ; Christ regarded narcotic religion as more evil than adultery. If there is religion of day-long, night-long prayer, or ritual or theological learning, and if that religion is used to conceal from ourselves an unfaced sin of selfishness or dishonesty or impurity, then that religion is evil. Of the grosser sins, far more damnable than gambling or adultery is the religion which is magnificent on the surface of life, but which has not converted the heart from fear to trust, or from resentment to love. Surface religion is more evil than other narcotics, because it means taking the name of Christ in vain,



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professing His name on our lips when we deny His love in our hearts ; and to do this is to conceal from others as well as from ourselves the real character of the saving power of Christ. If I drink myself to death, a few acquaintances feel an outward sorrow and an inward relief ; if I preach Christ without bearing witness in my life to the power of Christ, I deceive the world.

Unless and until we can describe our religion each new day in terms of a spontaneous Spirit of love and joy and calm, which scarcely needs to be spoken from our lips because it is so evident in our lives, we must needs go back and learn the message of John, the forerunner. To claim the power of Christ in our lives when we lack it, is to deceive the world as to His power. We are Pharisees who need the Baptist's message. Our Christianity is no Christianity, but a flight from the wrath of God into the false comfort of an unreal sentimentalism. For the Christian there are only two possibilities, witness to the spontaneity of the gift of the Spirit in the heart, or open penitent expectancy when the Spirit has departed ; any-

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thing else, any concealing of an inward unrest behind an outward piety, has been left behind with Pharisaism.

An ancient story tells of a princess of rare and delicate feeling, who could not sleep at night, because of the presence of a pea under her mattress. She piled mattress upon mattress, cushion upon cushion, blanket upon blanket, but still she spent sleepless nights, and complained of the intolerable lump in her bed. The princess is an exact picture of those who slumber on the soft bed of ever greater works of religious practice, because at some point in their life, which they seek in vain to bury, they have a conscience which rebukes them for unfaced sin. If in the name of God we offer forgiveness, and seek to call them back to obedience to His guiding word, they will protest, as well they may, that they are already very religious. If we speak of conversion and rebirth, they will pile on further blankets of pious phrase and pious practice. Their utmost endeavour will not win for them the inward peace of the soul which has faced its shame before Christ and before the Christian fellowship, and is

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changed at heart into new love. There will come a day when they will see how vain and how unnecessary were the piled up coverings on which they sought to find rest. They will suffer their conscience once more to speak, and acknowledge where it has spoken. They will remove from their souls the offending pea ! Thereafter, they will make a new and unexpected discovery. They will find that it was a delusion of their old nature, to suppose that they were so sensitive as to need a perpetual bed of ease. On the hard floor, with scanty covering, which the real world offers to those who face its reality, they will sleep a short but restful dreamless sleep, such as never before they knew ; and they will arise early to some labour in the world, more profitable to God and to their neighbours and to themselves, than their former work of buying more and yet more blankets.

Behind the petty anxieties and irritations which fall short of love and joy, behind the flight into the unrealities of drink and gambling, behind the deeper and more deadly evasion of a hypocritical religion, still as symptom, though nearer the heart of sin,

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there lies one of the strongest of the powers of evil, Fear. 'Fear,' writes Dr. MacDougal, 'is the great inhibitor of action, both present action and future action.' Fear holds us back from day to day from the adventure of faith, so that when others go forth to the land of Promise, not yet knowing whither they go, we are left behind. Fear prevents us from leading others forward. Christ bids us witness to others of His power; and the fear of their opinion if we speak makes us preserve in the world the conspiracy of silence. It is vain to force our way through fears; if we force ourselves to speak with fear in our hearts, we shall witness not to Christ but to the latent powers of evil, which His love has not yet been allowed to conquer; and the neighbour to whom we witness will not be inclined to give his life to the labour of such over-anxious witness. If we fear, we must return in quiet to Him whose perfect love can and does cast out fear. God, if we wait in quiet in all honesty of mind, will unravel our fears, and show that they rest on deeper sins of pride and self-concern. What do the opinions of men matter? It is the sin of

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pride to seek for human praise ; ours is the one desire to learn and obey the will of God. What do the dangers that lie ahead matter, even if they include the dangers of death itself? If God wills to use us for further work, He will guide us through all dangers in safety. If God wills to take us to Himself, to depart and be with Him shall be our choice. There was a moment when the first disciples were afraid. Storms threatened their life. The Master must be summoned and made to realise that His . . . ; no, it was their lives for which they were afraid. To Christ the noise of the storm prevented for the moment His labour of love, of leading others into the joy of obedience to God. He could not at the moment be used for proclaiming the Gospel ; the storm then was just a God-given opportunity for leisure, and the disciples found Him asleep.

Deeper than even fear as power of evil is latent lethargy. The Christian pilgrim has his eye set with living glance on the future, waiting from moment to moment the next step which God would have Him take towards fuller life. To God belongs the field

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of straight furrows ; none who look back are worthy to plough. Militating against the forward look of life is the law of lethargy which makes for death. Lethargy holds us from God in trivial daily disobedience, making us prefer hours of profitless slumber, when we should rise to hear the new words of God. Lethargy makes us shrink from the disturbance of our accustomed habits, if we should make the great adventure, and give God all. With lethargy, the evil one tempts us to build cities on the shifting sands of the desert, when God would have us live in tents, and march on toward the Land of Promise. Lethargy leads us to the costless celebration of past revivals, when the Spirit of God demands that we ourselves should be revived. Lethargy makes us set up a monument to the faith of yesterday, thereby missing the call of God on our obedience to-day. Let them that build tombs beware lest they live in tombs.

Now at last, knowing ourselves sick at the point of death, we may be ready to learn from the Master Physician the cause of our sickness, and to receive at His hands our

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cure. We shall know that we have been placed under the crisis, whether we live for self, or whether we die to self and live to God, and that we have taken the false choice. We shall know that we have tried to be a God to ourselves, that we have let self rule our will : self-love, self-importance, self-pity, self-gratification, self-interest, self-assertiveness, self-indulgence, self-concern.

From the Master Physician we shall then learn our cure. He will come with the promise of new health, if we give ourselves entirely into His hands. He will bring us once more into the crisis, whether for self or whether for God, as though the past had never been. He will make the crisis concrete, by giving us at first gentle easy tasks to perform in His service. We shall meet sin at the point where it is really sin, the point where God speaks, and man is called to answer, and sins if he disobeys. If we obey, we shall find that the promises of Christ were not in vain. We shall find that step by step, as we are able to bear it, He heals our past mistakes and changes our hardened natures into the likeness of His Nature of Love. Our

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life will be freed into so great a joy, that we shall realise that we can never trust enough, and never expect too much from the fullness of the bounty of the Love of God.

The Baptism of John, the forerunner, unto repentance prepares for the coming of the Kingdom. The Cross with its negation on human achievement prepares for the Resurrection unto new life. Life must be stripped of its veneer of piety, and stripped of all its needless sinful fears and anxieties, and the inmost revolt against God laid bare ; then God can forgive, and cleanse the temple of the soul to receive the gift of His Spirit of purity and love.

The life of men in a fallen world becomes like a shrivelled bulb. Having once revolted against the living will of God, to the outer world we show a front of fretful anxiety, little better than the wrinkled skin of a bulb. We strip this skin, and behind it there is a hard layer of human theory ; there are the prejudices of principle and opinion, which our small minds have formed, and to which now nature and man and God Himself must conform. Theories are torn aside, and there

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appears the next hard layer of aggressive resentment, hiding what lies behind. Behind this resentment, there are the long, sad memories of failure, where impurity and dishonesty and lovelessness have reigned. Behind again, there are the hidden forces of pride and jealousy and envy and lust, which caused our acts of shame. In our cynicism it may seem that in these the whole nature of the bulb consists ; that its shrivelled outer skin is the best that it ever has to offer to the world. Certainly no mere stripping of the skins, no mere disruptive, destructive analysis of an individual's personality, will produce a fairer result. Nevertheless, in our inmost heart there remains the seed of life, which God has set there, and which the utmost powers of evil cannot destroy. The bulb is nourished with the penetrating sunlight of the forgiveness of Christ, and set in the warm soil of the Christian fellowship. From the shrivelled bulb there then springs in the miracle of God, leaf and flower and fruit. The selfish anxieties and irritations and resentments which encased the soul perish in the ground ; from them in the mercy of

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God there springs the plant, strong and fair  
and free. ‘The fruit of the Spirit is love,  
joy, peace. . . .’

## VIII

### THE SWORD OF LOVE

*'Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.'*

*'The Word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart.'*

*'Think not that I came to send peace on the earth : I came not to send peace, but a sword.'*



## CHAPTER VIII

### *THE SWORD OF LOVE*

THE living God is a God, strong in love, stern in anger against sin, most strong in love when He forgives that which has moved Him to anger. The fault of the modern Christian world is not that it has too much theology, nor that it has a formal and dead theology, but rather that it has an untrue theology. Modern theology has taken away the reminder of the anger of God, and has pictured God as an amiable figure, who is not allowed to rebuke sin and cannot heal it. We have not dared to stand under the anger of God. We have selected for our comfort all the passages which speak of the love of God in the Bible, and we have ignored all the passages which speak of His anger, as though they found their way into the Bible through some human error. It is we who have erred. We have turned the doctrine

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of the forgiveness of God into the comfortable theory, which costs nothing and achieves nothing, that God in His mercy loves us as we are, and that we can therefore freely continue as we are. The doctrine of the forgiveness of God in Christ starts with a Cross, and there we must first learn how greatly we need to be forgiven. We must face the moment of shame where our secret sin stands unveiled before the anger of God. Only then shall we realise that God in Christ loves us, not because of what we are, but despite of what we are, and for the sake of what through His grace we may become.

Certainly God is Love. The whole importance of this essay is to magnify the majesty of the forgiveness of God, and to prevent it from being continually sentimentalised into an amiability, which leaves things as they are. Certainly God is infinite in tenderness, wherever there is a spirit already broken, a pride humbled, a heart conscious of guilt and anxious to find relief. A bruised reed He shall not break. But equally certainly, where the voice of conscience has been deadened behind the thick

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padding of external piety, there God is stern in wrath, that He may awake the buried spirit to new life, and so free it for the joy of new love. Where the still voice of conscience convicts us of unfaced sin, and we refuse to listen, there God can still speak through the thunder, to make His Word break through our deaf ears. Wherever there is a complacent acceptance of things as they are, and a refusal to face the sins which inhibit our growth, there the commission still comes to some in the modern world, as it came to Jonah, 'Thunder in their ears that their wickedness is known to Me.' The hardened heart, rigid in self-elected piety, must, for the sake of the greater joy that lies ahead, learn its own hardness. The strong love of God rises from amiability, and gains its strength through the undertone of wrath.

The Bible, if we use it rightly, will continually speak God's living Word as a sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of our soul and spirit, discerning those thoughts and intents of the heart which most we would conceal. The Bible is not intended as a quarry, wherein we can hew the stones

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of comforting texts, for the high wall which shall protect us from the knowledge of sin. To repeat pious texts with our lips, and to refuse to allow God's word to pierce our hearts, is simply to take His name in vain. It is not written in the Bible, 'Where two or three are gathered together to take my name in vain, there am I in the midst.' The Bible is the human words of those who accepted God's message of rebuke, and who then foresaw, and in time received the gift of His Spirit. The New Testament is the expression in words of the new quality of life which came and comes, where every possession and every thought, even our inmost thoughts of shame, are laid at the feet of Christ. If its words are not rich with living Spirit to us as we read them, then its words must become a convicting warning, that we have lost or have never yet found their quality of life. As we read the Bible, as we really listen to God speaking His Word to us through its human words, then phrase after phrase will rebuke us for the lower life, which we in our complacency have been content to live. The words of the Bible are spear-heads pricking



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our self-esteem. The words of other books too, even such as this, the free Spirit of God may use if He chooses as His swords. The Cross which stands in the centre of the Bible stands first before us a sword, pricking our silly bubble of pride, till we too make ourselves of no reputation before men, by acknowledging our sin. There are only two legitimate ways of reading the Bible. If we lack the spontaneity of God-given love and joy, then the Bible must be suffered to speak to us, convicting our conscience, until it sends us to the Baptism of John, in all humility confessing our sin before men. If it should happen that we have been baptised with the water of penitence and with the Spirit, then the Spirit which first gave birth to these words will echo in our hearts across the ages, and in all humility we shall join the writers, in giving praise to the God who can give such joy unto men.

The Bible is the cradle of Christ, and in Him in perfection we learn what God from eternity says to men. Christ in the image of God, just because He loves to the uttermost, is not afraid to call sin sin, and to use strong

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terms to awaken the world to its sinfulness. We make a grave error if we suppose that we should have felt immediately happy in His company, as we enjoy the presence of friends who agree with us. In His presence we should have learnt that many things in our own character, to which we had long grown accustomed, which perhaps we even regarded as our native temperament, were, in fact, sins which hindered His work and must be removed. The closer we came to Him in discipleship, the closer should we come to the cry, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.' If we take to ourselves all the phrases in the Gospels which speak of the love of Christ, and eliminate all traces of the sternness of Christ, we may end with a figure characterised by that soft amiability which we ourselves call love ; it will be a curious error if we complete that process of elimination by calling it scientific Gospel criticism. The Christ of the Gospels, the Christ represented by those who were nearest to Him in time and in thought and in love, is stern in the deeper interests of love, ever ready to hurt, if by hurting He may heal.

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He describes those who are religious without and impure within, with the strictly accurate picture of whited sepulchres ; and He does not mind if they go away offended, and hate Him for His accuracy. He asks from one who is very near to becoming a follower, the one thing which the man will not give, just because He knows that fullness of happiness only comes to those who give all. Because He knows the joy of a soul, wholly at peace with itself because wholly given to God, He is not afraid to state with equal clarity the opposite side of the picture, the weeping and wailing of those who have shut themselves off from this joy.

The religious contemporaries of Christ are said to have had in their traditions and in their teaching all the language of love which Christ Himself used. They knew and practised all things which man can practise to make life religious. They lacked only, according to Christ, the weightier matters of the law. The first of these weightier matters was judgement, the willingness to be convicted of sin in the heart, and the willingness where God guides to be His spokesman for convicting

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others. Only where there has first been judgement can there then follow mercy, a real forgiveness which actually remits sin, instead of driving people by a merciless gentleness into ever greater depths of sin. Where sin has been faced and confessed and cast out, there the conscience is cleansed and purified to fulfil its proper task, and to listen in other matters to the guiding voice of God. There can then follow the faith which hears and obeys God's will, and which, living under authority, can itself speak and act with authority. The modern world is suffering from a loss of faith, a loss of the glad confidence and courage of hope. The guilt for this loss of faith lies largely at the doors of the modern Christian Pharisees, who to their praise have toiled all night in sacramental worship and in commenting on the Scriptures, but who have neglected the weightier matters of the law, judgement and mercy and faith.

The Word of God must come, and come ever again, first into our own hearts, piercing every religious veneer, making us aware of new sins we had not noticed, showing us new

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spheres of life, on which we had as yet kept jealous human hands. As we receive the sword into our own hearts, so also we must then be bold where God bids to take it into our hands, and with it in His name to convict others of sin. At all costs we must keep the sword clean. All too easily we may mistake human resentment and irritation for the God-guided anger which hurts to heal. All too easily, such is the weakness of our poor human nature, we may even find that we have been taking pleasure in the pain which others suffer. The sword must become sharp and delicate as a surgeon's lancet in our hands. With utmost effort we shall beware that no uncleanness on its blade, and no flicker in the hand that uses it, makes its wound hurt more than is necessary. Yet pain there cannot but be. The moment when another soul is brought to face and acknowledge its selfishness and pride is a moment costly in humiliation, and only by leading the other soul to pay this cost will that soul be won for the greater joy that lies ahead. It is a very great responsibility to hold and to misuse the sword of love, and to

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cause unnecessary pain by the clumsiness with which we wield it ; it is a far greater responsibility to leave a soul in the greater pain of sin, by refusing to use the sword when God places it in our hand. All too easily the conventions of modern amiability will make us hold back from saying the one hard word of rebuke which at the critical moment God bids us say. We disobey the claim that was put upon us, to be instruments of the wrath of God ; the other soul is left in the complacent death which it thinks to be life, and we ourselves find that the Spirit leaves us, until we have repented of our disobedience. We must not excuse ourselves from holding God's sword by saying that we are not yet perfect ourselves. We must not fear that others in their turn will accuse our imperfection, but must gladly allow them to do so. Only with such constructive strife will the Christian fellowship grow in love. St. Paul could write the noblest Christian hymn on love. He was well aware that he had not yet fully attained. St. Paul could say to another man for love's sake, ' O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the

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devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?' We may think this was a momentary lapse ; the writer of Acts says that he spoke in the Spirit. Such is the plain speaking of the Holy Spirit of Love ; and we must not refuse to let the Spirit speak such words through us, when through such words He may liberate a neighbour from sin into the fullness of life. Doubtless, it was a little extreme to think of calling down the avenging fires of heaven on a village which had been neglectful in hospitality. Those who made that suggestion had not yet fully learnt that the moment of divine wrath is not intended to destroy our enemies, but comes only in the interest of a deeper love to save and heal. The Christ of the Gospels, however, did not reject from His followers those who thus spake, as would the amiable Christ whom we have put in His place ; He kept them in the inner circle of His apostles, and nicknamed them sons of thunder, for fun.

The religion which consists in showing to the outward world words and acts of love, while preserving a convicted sin unconfessed

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in the heart, involves the constant strain of a personality at war with itself. It is no kindness to such people to show to them an amiable love which leaves them as they are. It is far more loving to drive a sword into their hearts, to force them to recognise the sin which holds them back from the complete self-giving to God. If they are sheltering behind an outward profession of piety and dogma, the sword may need to be driven hard home through their leather-hardened hearts, in order that they may once more be convicted of secret sin. Those who are thus convicted will inevitably resent it. They will buy chain armour to protect them from the pricks of conscience ; they will defend themselves by counter-attack. What was said by the French naturalist of a certain animal is true of most human animals : ‘ *cet animal est très méchant ; quand on l’attaque, il se défend !* ’ They will defend themselves from the attacks of a convicting conscience, by focussing their dislikes on those whom the Spirit uses to convict them. The disciples of Christ, inheriting His other blessings, will inherit not least His blessing on them



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that are reviled. Nevertheless there is no other method by which hearts may be freed to receive the gift of the Spirit. The fullness of divine love is willing to hurt men, in order that they may be freed to receive the fullness of the divine gift. The messengers of Christ in the world, with the gift of His Spirit in their hearts, will out-live, out-laugh, out-love the rest of the world ; yes, and they must also be prepared, when the Spirit guides, in love's name to out-hate the rest of the world, and to be hated in return. It is by the Christ of Love that the words are spoken, 'If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.'

By various methods the Spirit will bring us, and use us to bring others to that moment of wrath, wherein sin is faced and acknowledged, in order that later it may be confessed and cured. Sometimes, where a person is sheltering from hidden shame behind unreal religious theories or the memory of a now dead religious past, God

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may lead us to use the heavy artillery of proclaiming with reiterated attack, that the religion behind which the person shelters is just sham. Sometimes a sudden change of voice, and the confession that we also have sinned in some concrete detail and need forgiveness, may thrust the sword home, and lead another to acknowledge that at heart he too is convicted. It may be that a chance action, springing from a heart of love, will pierce the heart of an onlooker without our knowing it, and show him that his own life is not such as to have produced this action. Sometimes, again, a single sharp word, 'But this is sin,' may be the rapier-thrust which convicts, and enables us immediately to add, 'With God there is forgiveness of sin.' Love is a good listener, and sometimes silence, and the willingness to listen, may be His sword. One day, God may lead us to convict and heal in a moment a stranger to whom we have barely spoken for half an hour. Another time, God may require us to wait patiently at a person's side, day by day for long years, that a sick soul may be led gently to the point where it knows its sickness, and be-

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comes willing to receive the medicine of His answering love. No rule and no technique can determine how the initial wrath of God shall be made known. The servant of God must himself live in constant renewed penitence, and constant renewed receptivity to the guiding voice of the Spirit, that so he may discern which is the hour for wrath and which is the hour for love.

The servant of Christ must have the courage to speak, sword in hand, to pagan and religious unbeliever. The unbeliever may be one with whom we have closest ties of family or kindred. He may be a pagan in revolt against all forms of religion. He may, on the other hand, attend our Christian meetings, and use all our Christian language, and hold back only from the one point of sharing with us, where God has most convicted him of sin. Whichever he be, with utmost gentleness, yet with utmost firmness, the sword must be used. Those who refuse to hear the conscience that accuses, are unable to hear the conscience that guides. They will bring into the Christian assembly good advice, and they may

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call their human advice divine guidance, but they will not have heeded and will not be able to speak the clear, authoritative Word of God. If we do not beware, their human advice will become a blanket that enfolds and smothers the spark of life. There can be no meeting for common action between those who speak of human advice and human desires and human prejudices, and those who have learnt through humiliation to listen and hear and obey the guiding voice of God. Human opinion, and the conscience which first convicts and only then guides, are as oil and water, which do not mix. Even if it means setting kindred against kindred, even if it means to all appearance setting Christian against Christian, when God so guides, the sword that pierces soul and spirit must be driven home. Peace, Christ came to bring, but the peace of common loyalty from moment to moment to God, not the peace of compromise between the conflicting tastes and opinions of men ; if peace is sought on that level, then the word of Christ is clear, ' I came not to bring peace but a sword.'

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The servants of Christ will have the courage to stand before the rulers of this world, and even the rulers of the Churches, sword in hand, rebuking it may be first like Christ by word and action, rebuking it may be then like Christ by their silence when they are reviled. Leaders whose hearts through long impatience have grown stale and hardened will resent any possible criticism, and resent that, where they in the past have laboured and have ceased to labour, others are now gathering the fruit. We shall not court, and we shall not lightly accept a too quick approval, from those who love God with their lips and by their office, but who, despite their office, lack His joy and love in their hearts and His guidance in their lives. The living Spirit of God is stifled where it is patronised ! We shall accept approval only from those who share with us their sins. Those who have grown stale in their office must learn, whether they like it or no, that it is out of the mouths of babes that God has perfected praise ; they must learn in all humility from the faith and the freedom and joy which some new convert has found and

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they have lost ; they must once more become themselves as babes. Let God's beloved babes stand courageous before rulers, ready to rebuke by silence or by word or by action, ready to bear unafraid the moment of hostility, when their sword drives home. If enemies of the living Spirit of God persecute, as they will persecute wherever the Spirit performs His convicting work, then let us pray ! We shall not pray for ourselves in timidity, lest enemies should do us harm. We shall pray for our enemies in radiant courage, knowing from their hostility that the Spirit has begun His work, rejoicing that the Spirit is irresistible, and will lead them on from their first complacent approval, through the moment of hostility, into identification with all who obey His Word. There will be many, who have grown old in years but not in spirit in their Christian ministry, from whom there will come a genuine welcome, when as in these days the Spirit of God breaks once more into the world in power. The real fishers of men, who have toiled through long night hours for their Master without success, will not become

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either patronising or resentful when others begin to succeed where they have failed. Their hearts will be set still on their fishing ; and they will welcome the news from whomsoever it comes that a draught still awaits them, if they will but listen once more to the word of Christ and launch out anew.

The sword of love will be wielded most constantly within the Christian fellowship, as each aids each to build the fellowship up in love. Let those who would know what criticism means work in intimate fellowship with disciples of Christ, in the labour of winning others for Christ. Such is the delicacy of the response of personality to the claim of God, that every word and every gesture of those engaged in the work becomes of infinite significance. In full earnestness the phrase is fulfilled, 'Every idle word which men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgement.' A soul may be lost for long years to Christ because at the critical moment, when that soul was about to acknowledge its need of forgiveness, a passer-by interrupted conversation with a casual, unguided remark.

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Pretext for resentment the unredeemed will always find ; the Christian fellowship must grow from day to day in purity, till it becomes harder and harder for the resentful to find their pretext. Face to face with Christ it is a clear issue ; men can only evade His claim by passing to the opposite extreme, and saying that His whole work is diabolical ; thus it should be as they are brought face to face with a sinless fellowship of disciples. From day to day for this end the disciples will criticise one another in love, correcting every unveiled sin and every trifling fault, till love reigns without spot or blemish. Within the fellowship, the sword will become the needle which pricks a blister almost without pain, that its poison may escape. Within the fellowship, hearts will be softened, till they accept every word of criticism, immediately grateful that a fellow disciple has enabled them to advance a further step nearer to the perfection of Christ. Thus at long last, having done its work, the sword of love shall be sheathed.



IX

*THE CHURCH*

*‘Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.’*

*‘Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.’*

*‘Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you.’*



## CHAPTER IX

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THE orchestra agrees to receive from its conductor the music it shall play. It agrees that all eyes shall be fixed on him, from moment to moment taking the time from his guiding hand. If it is a question of receiving the appointed music and obeying the guiding hand of the conductor, the members of the orchestra must be completely rigorous with one another, and with any others who would join them. Within this agreement there is then room for very great variety; and the greater the variety of instrument and harmony, the more the music is enriched. Two follies might then rob the orchestra of its beauty. If other players should come, proclaiming that they have instruments of rare beauty, and tunes of their own composing to play on them, they must at all costs be refused admittance, unless and until they will agree to take the

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same conductor as their master. To admit new instruments or new tunes, without this completely rigorous insistence on the sovereignty of the conductor, would be at once to change the harmony of the orchestra into shattering discord. On the other hand, within the harmony there is room for infinite variety. It is not legitimate for the clarionet to say that he does not appreciate the sound of the trumpet behind him, and that there is no place in the orchestra for any but clarionets. It is not legitimate for the first violin to say that he has been given so pleasant a part to play that the second violins should play the same part. It would be folly to suffer the presence of discordant instruments in the orchestra, and it would be as great a folly to demand that the whole of the orchestra should be reduced to a unison of similar instruments. The follies which would destroy the beauty of the orchestra are so evident that it may appear foolish even to mention them. Despite their very evident folly, the Church of Christ suffers its beauty to be shattered by precisely these two defects.

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The Church is the fellowship of people over whom God in Christ has proclaimed forgiveness, to whom now the Spirit speaks with guiding voice, and who respond in the obedience of faith. Within this fellowship there must be complete rigourism, if it is a question of acknowledging and hearing and heeding and obeying the One Lord. Those who would claim to be members of the Church must be asked whether they are prepared to surrender every desire to play their own tune, in the crisis of faith, whether they live for self or whether for God. If they are not prepared to listen and hear and obey the One Lord, they will not be able to respond with the one faith, and it is vain for them to seek unity with the outward sign of one baptism. If they are living for their own desires, even it be the most lofty religious or theological desires, their presence will only make for discord. They must give to God an absolute loyalty ; and this will mean that whatever their vocation, they will be used to bring their neighbours also to the joy and the liberty of the service of God. Within this fellowship there is, then, room

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under the guidance of the one Spirit for a great variety of instrument and part. The Spirit distributes offices to each one severally as He will. Prophet and teacher and evangelist, yes, and if God so guides, doctor and scientist and merchant, can work together in the one fellowship in harmony ; and they will not be so foolish as to insist that they can only remain in the Church, if all others play the part which it has been given to them to play.

In different ages, where men have been called by the One God into the life of faith, varied language has been used for the resulting liberation of life into love and joy and peace, and varied forms have arisen for the expression of this life. The primitive Church received with the gift of the Spirit a life of a quality which before its members had not known ; they borrowed from the common speech common terms such as ' conversion ' and ' regeneration ' and ' justification,' wherewith to give expression to their new life. In later ages, after seasons of darkness, the Spirit has again come in power to the world ; sometimes old terms have sprung into new life, as scribes learned in

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the traditions have then used of their new life, terms old and now once more new ; sometimes a new community has, like the early Church, borrowed common terms from modern common speech, such as ' change,' ' release,' and ' guidance.' Those who themselves have not repented and have not received the Spirit cannot understand the new life for which the terms are being used, and they therefore commonly resent the apparent obscurity of the theological vocabulary, old or new. Those who have received the Spirit know that words are unimportant, except as pointers to a dedication of will and a change of heart. Since there is but one Holy Spirit, the new life of faith which the Spirit grants is also one ; and those who are reborn into that life find themselves quickly in fellowship with the saints of all ages. Knowing the same life, they become interpreters of the varied language which in different ages the Spirit of God has used.

The life of the Christian fellowship may be described in the most general possible terms as a life wherein men obey conscience and refrain from telling one another lies. General

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though these terms are, they each point to a life which is utterly impossible, apart from a prior trust in the loving and living Creator and Redeemer. I cannot discern conscience amid the conflicting human voices in my mind, unless I have acknowledged that it is the sovereign Creator who speaks, and have acknowledged that He is rightful Lord over every sphere of my life. I dare not obey conscience, unless I trust that the voice which I hear is the voice of the loving Creator of myself and of the world around me, who will guide only in accordance with His far-seeing purposes of love. I can only find fellowship with my fellow men in obedience, because it is the one living God who speaks to all, weaving into a coherent pattern under His reign the society which is disintegrated, whenever its members each go their own individual way. Where I do trust the Creator and obey His orders in conscience, there I find that life does in fact become orderly, in the double sense of that term ; men live under orders, and their lives are thus brought into the quiet orderliness of the life-changing Reign of God.



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Only with a like trust in the One God, who has made His forgiveness known in Christ, is there liberty for the Christian fellowship to refrain from telling one another lies. If I have, in my heart, doors which are closed by fear, and hidden rooms of shame which I dare not open to my fellow men, inevitably sooner or later I shall be led into dishonesty, in order to conceal my shame. I shall show to the outside world, and endeavour to preserve before myself, a life which is not genuine, and which does not express the inmost secrets of my heart. To act a part in the world which is not genuine, to pose whether as religious or irreligious, is to tell to the world a living lie. The early Church were bidden be willing to tell one another their inmost thoughts. The instruction is clear, 'Putting away falsehood, speak ye truth each one with his neighbour ; for we are members one of another.' In Christ the instruction not only should, but can be taken in fullest rigour. The mind that is at peace within, and honest to all without, is possible, where there is faith in the forgiveness of Christ ; if we are inclined to think that full

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honesty is not possible, or not even desirable, it is a sign that we do not as yet know as living reality the meaning of faith in Christ. Where Christ has seen and forgiven, there can be no longer shame before men ; the proud depart from the Cross with a continued inhibition against freedom of speech ; those who are there humiliated with their Master find that past shame becomes evidence of the mercy of Christ. The living guidance of Christ is as everywhere sovereign over principles, and there is no principle that the Christian must everywhere blatantly speak of his own sins. The living guidance of Christ is, however, also sovereign over all our memories ; and the Christian who has learnt His forgiveness will be willing to let Him claim his past failures for concrete open witness, where to do so will lead others to face the same failures and to find the same liberating forgiveness.

Our honesty about ourselves will be completed with a like honesty towards others. The efficient work of the Christian fellowship depends on the loyalty to Christ of each of its members ; if one suffers, the work for  
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Christ of all suffers. In one of his most pleasant cartoons Lowe pictured the statesmen of Europe in a boat. At one end a fountain of water was bursting through the planks, and a few men laboured with vain effort to hold it down. At the other end others sat in idle comfort, saying to each other, 'Phew, that's a nasty leak; thank goodness it's not at our end of the boat!' In the Christian fellowship none can afford to be complacent, while in any a vain battle with sin is leading to leakage of power. Within the Christian fellowship it will be possible with childlike directness to state to others faults which we have seen, and which their conscience has not yet discerned. If our speech with one another is directed by the all too human motive of winning the immediate approval of men, we shall constantly tell to one another judgements which do not express our real opinion, in other words, lies. To the unredeemed we must face the cost of speaking the judgements which the Spirit of God directs, even if it cost us at first their bitter resentment. Within the fellowship of the redeemed we

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shall be able to speak the judgements of the Spirit without such cost. Our neighbour will, like us, have been humiliated, and will have relearnt a childlike willingness to learn ; and he will be grateful and not offended if others show him ways in which he may serve his Lord more fully. We shall not suffer our faith to be shaken by the petulant defensive criticism of those who are merely shrinking from the challenge of faith ; we shall not suffer any pride to prevent our receiving constructive criticism from those who would lead us into fuller faith. In the Christian fellowship it is possible and natural to take literally the instruction, ' If thy brother sin against thee, go, shew him his fault between thee and him alone ; if he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he hear thee not, take with thee one or two more, that at the mouth of two witnesses or three, every word may be established. And if he refuse to hear them, tell it unto the Church, the Christian assembly.'

There can be no solitary Christian. The desire to remain solitary is a sign of the pride of isolation, which implies separation not

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only from man but from God. Only sin is a private affair ; anything, whether amid the peaks of divine experience or amid the depths of human guilt, which we insist on keeping to ourselves, is thereby rendered sinful. The Christian who has truly heard the call of God, and has believed, is thereby called out of an isolated individualism. He must enter into fellowship with other men. He will have received from God so great a liberation of Spirit into new joy and calm, that he cannot but help call others into the obedience of faith around him, in his desire to share with them his new found joy. He must and will labour, and the fault will not be his if he does not succeed in creating a fellowship of the redeemed around him, wherever Christ shall send him to live.

The Christian fellowship will be militant in evangelism, seeking continually for their greater joy to win others for the faith. There are three types of evangelism, and it is important that they should be distinguished in modern evangelical work, as they are distinguished in the Gospels.

The first type of evangelism says outwardly

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to others, 'You ought to give your life wholly to God,' or 'You ought to let Christ heal you from sin.' Inwardly it says, very faintly, underneath the louder outward voice, 'I have not given my life wholly to God,' or 'I only wish I knew how Christ would heal me from sin.' This type of evangelism may endure long after we think to have left it behind. Outwardly we say, 'Christ, if you only let Him, can bring you joy and freedom from fear.' Inwardly we say, 'It's a damnably anxious and awkward business my having to speak about Christ, and endeavour to convert you.' The world is not impressed. It judges our religion by what we are, and not by what we say ; and it has no desire itself to be brought to this kind of double dealing. Judaism, with its long centuries of religious tradition, its law and its temple, had a religion and a morality which stood high above the pagan world. The scribes and the Pharisees were learned and most conscientious representatives of that religion. Jesus Himself sprang from it. And Jesus said unto them, 'Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! for ye compass sea and land to make one

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proselyte, and when he is become so, ye make him two fold more a son of hell than yourselves !' The phrase suggests that not quite all forms of raising the ethical and religious level of the world received our Lord's commendation. Coffins do not cease to be coffins when their varnish is bought in a Christian factory. Fortunately, this type of evangelism is not very dangerous except to those who practise it, for it is so unconvincing that it does not turn very many people into children of hell.

The second type of evangelism says in full honesty, 'I am fearful or unloving or ashamed, and I seek from God a Kingdom which I hope for, but have not yet found.' The unusual realism of this type of evangelism surprises the world into honesty, and makes many others honest. John with his message, 'Repent for the Kingdom is at hand,' made many converts, and a sect of his disciples lasted on into the days of the early Church, and spread as far as Ephesus. The message of the Baptist would seem to have been divided into two parts in the modern world. As John called respectable

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religious people a generation of vipers, so Barth on the continent writes, 'The man whom the Church with much labour attains, the pious man self-justified by his piety, is the last strong obstacle this side the action of God ; hence the cleansing of the temple.' As John insisted on the open penitence of Baptism, so modern novelists such as D. H. Lawrence dare to strip life of its pretences, and to see life in its nakedness. In each case a vigorous realism wins disciples from a world which is tired of pretence. This stripping of life of its veneer, and the open facing of evil, is always the proper forerunner for the Kingdom. This type of evangelism is legitimate for Christians in the seasons when faith is broken. It is far more healthy to acknowledge the real facts of our nature, than to hide them behind a merely formal profession of Atonement theology, or a sanctimonious attention to the external details of the mass.

The third type of evangelism, with equal realism, says, 'God has liberated me from the tyranny of fear and from these particular sins which before I could not conquer, and



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life is so full of the joy of freedom, that, if you would permit, I long to tell you by what methods God's healing came.' It is this type of evangelism which sent St. Paul coursing through Asia Minor. We shall understand his theology when the same passion of joy sends us out to proclaim the Gospel of Christ. It is this, and this alone, which has the right to the name of Christian, for it is this which bears witness to the power of the living Christ. It is not surprising that of this witness to the joy of God it is said, 'The Pharisees heard that Jesus was making and baptising more disciples than John.' The Pharisees must then take to themselves the reminder, that only those who listen to the first earthly message of a humiliating Baptism unto open penitence, can expect to appreciate the later heavenly message of Baptism with the Holy Spirit of calm joy, and of the power of life-changing love.

The Christian fellowship which takes out this message will soon find that crowds gather round. The fellowship, as a penitent and forgiving society, will then provide the home, wherein sick souls become cured.

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Wherever the Church has done her work, objective and subjective, the facts of Christ and the facts of changed lives, theology and the cure of souls, are so closely wedded that it is impossible to distinguish them. We cannot say in the New Testament where the experience of salvation ends and the theology of the Cross begins, because from beginning to end the two are intimately wedded in the one divine work of redemption. It is one of the tragedies of the modern world that these twin aspects of the Christian religion have become separated. Theology and the cure of souls are divorced ; they are practised by mutually hostile groups of people ; each takes some of the weapons from the Christian armoury, but is stultified for want of the other. On the one hand there is a theology, learned in the traditions as any scribe, but not changing lives from fear into faith. On the other hand there are non-religious psychologists, attempting the task of the cure of souls. They have learnt from the Gospel, what the Church had largely forgotten, that Christ does seek to heal the sinner rather than to blame him. Unfortunately, by their

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methods they are competent to analyse and to disrupt personality, but they are not competent to set the personality face to face with the healing love of God. All too often the work of a disruptive analysis provides an exact modern counterpart of the house, swept and garnished, and prepared for seven devils worse to enter in. From both of these hostile groups there will come criticism of such a view of Christianity as is set forth in this book, and the criticisms may present a curious opposition. On the one side theologians may say that it over-emphasises the importance of subjective experience in spiritual things. On the other side non-religious psychologists may say that there is not too little, but too great a stress on the objective facts of the work of Christ. The facts are that the Spirit is again breaking into His world in power, and that where He does so, He achieves in the Christian fellowship, with a most gentle ease, that healing of personality which analysts strive for, and charge for in more senses than one, and still fail fully to achieve. The work of the Spirit is not greatly damaged

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by criticism ; but for their own sake, and for the sake of those they seek to help, both formal theologian and non-religious psychologist might well ask whether their disagreement might not be solved, and their work enriched, if they each allowed the Spirit to perform His work of healing first with themselves.

The Church in the primary meaning is the fellowship of people, penitent and not afraid to acknowledge their cause for penitence, obedient in faith, trusting their common calling of God. Of this Church, as a fellowship of forgiven and forgiving people, we may say what we may never say of a Church bound by outward signs, '*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus.*' The Church in this sense is the goal of human life, though it is no static goal, but a fellowship which will be led by God to ever greater expansion, ever greater opportunities and work.

As this fellowship grows, it will necessarily find and seek visible expression in the world. It will use language to express and convey to others its new life of faith, and thus

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will arise Christian theology. It will desire frequently to wait in fellowship in silence for the speaking of the Spirit, and it will also desire a common language for prayer. It will necessarily meet for open witness to Christ, and for receiving His guidance, and for leading others to Him, and it will therefore have a time and a place for meeting. It will desire to worship the living Lord who has forgiven and granted new life, and it will perhaps in time draw up fixed forms of prayer. It will desire to commemorate His work by the celebration of the sacraments of His death and of rebirth. In early days, so great will be the need for evangelism, that all may well be called to be primarily itinerant evangelists ; later, as the fellowship grows in strength and size, others will be called to dedicate all their time to reside in local communities, and to lead them in building up the fellowship into fullness of love and faith. Buildings, times of meeting, a liturgy, a ministry, these all form the Church in the secondary sense ; they are the proper and inevitable by-product of the Church in the primary sense, expressing the

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life of the fellowship, and in turn ministering to build up that life.

Always there is the danger that men will use the term Church in the secondary sense, and forget its meaning in the primary sense. The danger is not a technical abuse of terms, but a devastating error in life. All too easily an external observance of the outward signs of the Church, repetition of theological language and attendance at religious ceremony, is substituted for the penitence and the resulting liberation of Spirit which first gave birth to these signs. The external signs of religion become a cloak wherewith to conceal a sick heart, instead of the expression of a heart reborn and whole. The soul of religion dies, and the external signs of religion remain. Religion grows stale. The name of God is on many lips, but the hearts of those who use it are unchanged.

There came a day in the fortunes of Judaism when religion was practised externally with immense fervour, but where inwardly it had grown stale. At that moment the Christ was born. He manifested for all time that the greatest enemy of the

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religion of a heart set free is the external religion of a heart still sick. Under His Cross men learnt to recognise their sickness. After His Resurrection men received the gift of His Spirit. Life was liberated into its proper spontaneity of love and joy. Those who in the graciousness of God had received this joy took their new gift, first, to the religious tradition in which they had earlier been nurtured. The early Christian missionaries turn first to the Jewish synagogues, proclaiming that it is the God of the Jewish traditions, who here manifests Himself in new power to a world grown tired. But, as one of those missionaries writes, a hardening in part had befallen Israel. They clung to their traditions ; they refused to recognise a revelation of God which was not in strict accordance with their conventions ; they dared not pierce below their pretence, and acknowledge their unrest at heart ; they persecuted to death those who threatened to expose the nakedness of their soul. Judaism was offered the new gift, but refused to recognise or accept it ; all unwillingly, the first Christian missionaries went henceforth

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to the Gentiles. With the first great betrayal, the Church was rent in twain, until the fullness of the Gentiles should come in, and Judaism should at last be put to shame. The new-born life of the Spirit was not allowed to flow through its natural channels in the home which had given it birth ; it was forced to forge for itself new channels, building the Christian Church in the Gentile world.

There came a day when the Christian Church had grown stale. The outward signs of its organisation were there, but they were associated with practices which had little to do with the Christian Gospel, and the world no longer heard Christianity as Good News. There arose Luther and Calvin and others who relearnt in their day, what the liberation of Christ had earlier meant to St. Paul. They offered their new liberty of Spirit to the Church, but the Church felt no need of their offer. A hardening in part had befallen Rome. In time it learnt a little of their message, but it learnt too late, and meanwhile the new life of the Spirit had been driven outside. Christendom was rent in twain. There followed, first the division

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of Christendom at the Reformation, and then the breaking up of the Reformed Churches into further sects.

One of these Churches which arose preserved, within the limits of one nation, much of the tradition of the Catholic Church, with much of the liberty of spirit of the Reformed. There came a time when the Church of England had in its turn grown stale. There arose John Wesley, to whom in his day religion ceased to be a matter of external forms, and became a rebirth of the Spirit through the healing power of Christ. He too offered his new gifts from Christ, first to the Church which had nurtured him, but it was not ready to repent. A hardening in part had befallen the Church of England. In time, in the later evangelical revival, the Church acknowledged that it also was in need of new life, and learnt much from Wesley's message ; but once more the Church acknowledged its own need of new life too late. The Church became again divided ; and again the new life of the Spirit, forging for itself new channels in the outside world, became further divided into a diversity of delta streams.

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It is very evident that in this modern day the Church has once more grown stale. There is an abundance of the externals of religion, of church-building and service and theological discussion ; these externals have, however, once more become narcotics drugging the sick souls of men instead of curing them. Grievous times once more have come, wherein men hold a form of godliness, but have denied the power thereof ; wherein they are for ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. All too evidently, despite the abundance of religious organisation, the hearts of men are unchanged, and the world in which the Church has laboured is faithless, hopeless, disillusioned and tired. The disorder in the world of political and industrial and social affairs betrays the lack of a radiant and loving faith in the hearts of men ; and the lack of faith betrays the failure of the Churches to bring men to Christ.

It is also evident that the very distress of the world is leading to a new season of awakening. Men in various countries are being forced to face real issues and real

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needs. No solution but the best will save them from their present discontents. The desolation of the far country, estranged from God, is leading them to turn back once more to their home in His presence. They are being led to find the real solution, not in theoretic cosmologies or religious ritual, but in penitence, the mercy of Christ, the obedience of faith. The new out-pouring of the Spirit of life-changing love in the Oxford Group Movement is a very evident sign, that we are in the early years of one of the big periods of reawakening, where the Gospel of forgiveness is proclaimed and believed, and men are liberated into a new Spirit of love and joy and effective calm of soul.

For these coming years, there is a hope born out of despair, which is daunting in its majesty. In the Churches, as in the outside world, the way has been prepared for revival, by that weakness of man which is the opportunity of God. To outward appearance, many Christian leaders through the ineffectiveness of the war and the post-war years have preserved a complacency with things as they are ; at heart, many if not all

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are sick, and already aware of their sickness, and waiting for the dawn of a new day. Moreover, this time for the first time in history, the Spirit of God has prepared the way for His work, by making us bitterly aware of the frustration of Christian work, through human disunion as to how that work shall be done. Our human efforts for reunion of the churches have as yet accomplished only very little ; they have at least made all the churches on their guard, lest a dawn of new life should once more lead to schism. The heart of the Christian institutions, which in earlier seasons of revival has been hardened in complacent formalism, is this day softened through a penitence born from despair. What may not happen, if this time, for the first time in history, a season of revival finds us prepared, so that God may lead the Churches, first to a new consecration each to their own Lord, then to the discovery that there is in fact one Lord, one faith, one baptism with water and His Spirit !

For this hope of the gathering up of the broken Churches into union in Christ, there

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is a cost to be paid. The cost will fall, where the Cross of Christ always casts its shadow, first on individual lives. Those who have been called to surrender their lives to the living Christ, and who have been granted new life in that surrender, will need to be immensely and continually receptive to His guidance at this point. They will not let any impatience of theirs with forms once living and now dead deafen them to His calling, to offer their message of new life each to their own Churches. Once more, at all costs, if Christ so guides, they must go first to the Anglican and Methodist and Presbyterian and other Christian societies. They must not compromise their gift, by accepting from those to whom they go a patronising approval, which costs nothing and achieves nothing. They must plead and entreat and confess and convict and exhort, if by any means the rulers of the Churches may turn again, and accept the power of the life-giving Spirit. Those who are in office in the Churches, but whose lives lack this power, will then have to pay the greater cost. Face to face with a fellowship of people on whom

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the life of the Spirit has been once more out-poured, such as is the Oxford Group Movement, they will be placed in the position of Nicodemus. Here is a teaching, familiar in its language, but possessing the power to work the miracles of lives transformed, when they themselves have lacked this power. They will be greatly provoked to let jealousy and pride rule their will. They may acknowledge that this new life of effective honesty and love is good for others, but they will shrink from admitting that they need it themselves. As the humiliation of penitence and rebirth draws near, they will be tempted to ignore the manifest signs of love, where God is heard and obeyed ; to focus defensive criticism on every petty defect in the human instruments, whom God is using far more than they, but whom He may not as yet have transformed into the full perfection of Love. It is not enough that the elderly Nicodemuses, devout, learned, industrious, but ineffective, who lead the Churches, should say with tolerant approval and occasional criticism, that such movements as the Oxford Groups are good for young men !

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They must ask themselves in all earnestness the question, 'Can a man be born again when he is old?' and allow no thought of personal fear or pride or cost to prevent them from hearing the answer.

The coming years will then be rich with a hope, not to be compared with any period in history since the first days of the Church. There is every sign that this time, for the first time in history, as there comes a new gift of the Spirit to the world, the Churches will acknowledge their failure and their need of rebirth in time. It is individual laymen and ministers in whose voices the voice of the Church is incarnate. In different parishes, in different denominations, in different countries, leaders of the Church, whose own personal lives had grown tired and stale, are coming to rebirth. Where a local minister has himself paid the cost in his own life of penitence and confession, and of a new absolute consecration to the living guidance of God, there he is then able to welcome the fellowship of other prodigals into their rightful home within the Church. Leaders of different denominations, and of

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different schools of thought within any church, must surrender to Christ, all their pride in their own traditions, and all their self-centred criticism of those whose opinion or practice differs from their own ; they will then find that Christ retains in His crucified hands, all that was exclusive and unloving, and re-entrusts to be shared with others, all that was most noble in each tradition. When the Churches, through the personal surrender of their members, have thus surrendered to the living Christ, they will find that the Lord whom they serve is One ; in new obedience to Him they will find one faith ; in His time they will be led in quiet before Him to the unity of one external baptism. Thus, bringing their varied gifts to the feet of Christ, they will join together in the one harmony of the heavenly orchestra. If for the first time in history, the dawn of a new day does not find the instruments disputing which shall be greatest, but finds them all watching with set face the guiding hand of their Lord, then, in a day, the world in all its varied life will resound with a beauty, such as never before it heard.



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The vision lies ahead, where every sphere of life shall be brought under the immediate guidance of the God of Love. Wherever men meet together, in committee of Parliament, in committee of City council, in committee of industry, in committee of University, men will meet to learn in fellowship before God, how God would have them perform His purposes of love. They will wait in silence before God, and they will acknowledge to one another, in penitence, every unworthy motive which His Spirit has exposed. With conscience clarified, they will have learnt each in their private lives to hear God's words and obey. With conscience clarified, they will seek the mind of God in fellowship before Him, and learn how in every sphere of life His purposes of love may be performed.

The vision lies ahead, of every home in every nation becoming a Church, where two or three are met together and Christ is present in the midst. Lives which have been sick unto despair in buried resentment, and in losing battles against evil, may in the power of Christ be changed in a day, into

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lives transparent in purity and honesty and love. We speak that we have seen ! The home is then the natural fellowship, for that daily listening to the convicting guidance of the Spirit, to His lessons through failure and His lessons for new acts of love, and for that daily witness, which complete from day to day His work of sanctification. Husband and wife, parent and child, whose lives have been frustrated in petty resentment and mutual distrust, will keep their time of quiet before God, and will write and share with one another, every thought of shame and every thought of promise to which His Spirit leads. Every home will then become a place where Christ is host and all are guests. Man will no longer treat man as animal, setting before the passing stranger food and drink, and neglecting the nourishment of the Word of God, for which the soul of man is hungry. We shall no longer invite guests into our houses, and bolt and bar in their face the doors of our souls. The deepest secrets of life, which are enjoyed in absolute open honesty within the family, will be offered in open enjoyment to every guest, who comes

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to join in the morning hour of fellowship before God.

The vision lies before us of all mankind become one Church, advancing in one fellowship upon the road of life. All men take their place upon that road, advancing forward as the Spirit of God comes, conquering and to conquer within the soul of man. The one sin is to disobey His calling to advance. By every means the powers of evil seek to hinder the forward march. Men are tempted and again tempted to rest in their present place, complacent in idle self-content, when the Spirit has scarcely begun to break the sin of self. The very sense of fellowship, wherewith men encourage each other forward, all too easily becomes a means, whereby the advance is hindered. A fellowship of men, which is perhaps advancing, yet not so fast as the Spirit would lead them forward, becomes complacent with its own present vision or its own customs of life ; they cry, ' Join us,' to the prophet who might lead them forward, hindering his advance, when if they listened to the Spirit of Life they would cry ' God-speed.' The vision

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lies before us of the conquest of the Spirit over every power of lethargy. All shall advance on the road, and each shall aid each to advance. Those who as yet are behind will rejoice when others move ahead ; they will welcome every opportunity to aid those ahead, by pointing out a path which they from behind have seen, but which lay hidden from those more near it. Those ahead will welcome without pride every suggestion which may aid their own advance, from whomsoever it comes. In love they will aid all whom they meet on the road. They will speak a stern word of love to those who have stopped, a tender word to those who have fallen, a word of good cheer to all who advance. Unhindered by any jealous blame from those who are led less quickly, they will move forward at the pace the Spirit leads, pioneers towards the City of God. Ahead of all, there stands the archway of the city, with words of flame above its doors, ' Be ye therefore perfect, as God is perfect.' On the threshold of the door, there waits the Christ. Perfect in love, He stands alone. Perfect in love, He stands

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desolate, since love languishes alone. Perfect in love, He stands triumphant, knowing that His unresting Spirit is leading all men forward, till with Him they reach the City of God, our Father.













